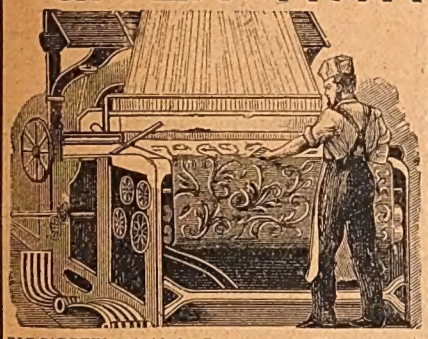
SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 349. FOR WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 7TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

BE SURE TO CUT

10,000 RUGS GIVEN AWAY.



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"45, George Street, Plymouth.

"GENTLEMEN,—The Carpet is duly to hand, and gives entire satisfaction.—Yours truly, J. C. PICKFORD."

"Mullaghmore.

"I beg to acknowledge receipt of Carpets, with which I am very pleased; they are splendid value for the money, and far superior to what I expected. Later on I shall be pleased to favour you with further orders.—Yours sincerely, H. CUNNINGHAM."

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STOMACH & LIVER COMPLAINTS DEBILITY

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100 PIECES

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A Nine-gallon Cask of Alcoholic Beer from a Brewery will cost you 10/6, but Eight Gallons of Beer made from

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Can be obtained for 6d., plus a pound or two of Sugar and a little Yeast.

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If unable to obtain it in your neighbourhood, send 9 stamps for sample bottle; or samples of both Wine Essence and Extract of Herbs, post free for 15 stamps.

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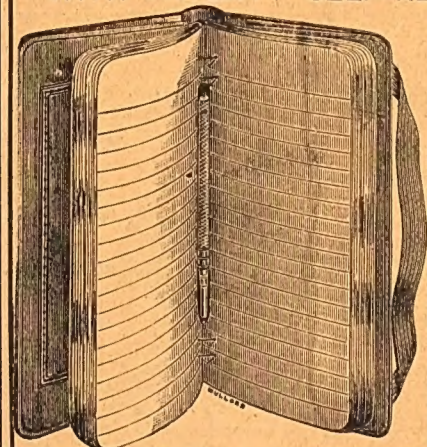
"AYE, READY!" NOTE-BOOK.

WITH PATENT "SELF-REGISTER."



THE HANDIEST AND THE BEST. THE SIMPLEST AND THE CHEAPEST.

As will be seen from the Illustration, this Note-Book has a hollow "rest" cut into the back, into which the Pencil falls and is securely held, while by means of an ingenious contrivance called a "Self-Register," the person using the Book can at once open it where he was last writing. A reference to any page in the front, the middle, or the end is also materially assisted by the "Self-Register."

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(The Early Symptoms.)

THE approach of this obstinate complaint may be clearly recognised by Pain, Fulness, and General Uneasiness after Food, Loss of Appetite (especially for Breakfast), Foul Tongue, Nausea, Sleepiness, Flushings of the Face, Redness about the Nose, Sick-Headache, and Giddiness. By bracing up the Mucous Membrane of the Stomach, increasing the quantity and improving the quality of the Gastric Juice, Guy's Tonic acts in a most wonderful way on every form of indigestion.

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It is particularly in cases of Indigestion and Nervousness that the remarkable strengthening and restoring properties of Guy's Tonic are most conspicuous. Its action upon the digestive and assimilative organs—and through these upon the entire frame—is little short of the miraculous.

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In Boxes, 9½d., 1s. 1½d., and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions.

Prepared only by the Proprietor,

THOMAS BEECHAM, St. Helens, Lancashire.

Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere.

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED
by
C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 349.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending September 7th, 1895.

A BUNCH OF GREENS.

AN individual whose right arm was encased in splints and hung in a sling entered a magnificent jewellery shop, the proprietor of which was a Mr. James Green. The stranger had that in his appearance generally styled *distingué*. His carriage and garb revealed the military veteran, and his manners the finished gentleman. At the door halted an elegant carriage, and the good taste of its owner was made apparent by the plain but neat livery of the groom and the choice trappings of the handsome high-bred horses.

The stranger stated that he was desirous of procuring a complete silver table service, rich, solid, and elegant, with but little ornamentation. Could Mr. Green prepare such an one for him? The goldsmith answered, of course, in the affirmative, and showed several patterns to his visitor, who then described very minutely the style in which he wished the articles to be made, and asked by what time they could be got ready. At the same time he insisted on punctuality, saying he must use the set at a reception he would soon give at his new residence in Leicester Square. Green promised to have it done in three weeks, and then the two parties discussed the terms.

The jeweller very carefully made up all his calculations, and demanded twelve hundred pounds. The stranger reflected a few moments, then said he had determined on getting a service at the cost of fifteen hundred pounds, and requested Mr. Green to add as many more pieces to the set as would fix the price at that sum. Mr. Green thanked the gentleman for this mark of confidence, and inquired of him to whose recommendation he owed his patronage.

"No one has recommended you to me," replied he.

The jeweller looked up in surprise. The stranger, who had hitherto worn an air of dignity almost amounting to austerity, now became more friendly, and continued:

"I'm a soldier. I have served for years in India, and more recently in Egypt. At Tel-el-Kebir I received a severe wound in my right arm and hand which will perhaps disable the member for life. My patronage you owe to your parents, grandparents, and, in fact, to the whole line of your ancestors."

The jeweller was amazed and bewildered. His parents and other ancestors had long been dead, and could not have referred the soldier to him. The latter apparently enjoyed Mr. Green's perplexity, and smilingly continued:

"I will make myself clearer. When, in consequence of this unfortunate wound"—here a sudden twinge in his arm made him start painfully—"I was compelled to leave the service, I resolved to settle down in London. While riding out the other day I was attracted by the appearance of your splendidly-furnished shop, but more so by the name on your sign, for mine is precisely the same. To this simple reason you owe the present visit of Colonel James Green, of the Grenadier Guards."

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The jeweller expressed his delight at the honour of being the namesake of so distinguished a warrior, and, after a few more pleasantries of this nature, reverted to the business in hand.

"May I now inform you," said the jeweller, with some hesitation, "of the conditions which must generally be complied with previous to making a sale?"

"No," said the Colonel sharply; "I have my own way of doing business. You and I do not know each other, and although my order is not an uncommonly large one, yet it amounts to a sum with which you cannot credit a stranger. I will, therefore, pay you one hundred pounds cash down for a surety, the remaining fourteen hundred pounds when I call for the service."

Mr. Green accepted the offer with profuse thanks.

"You need not thank me," the officer interrupted; "as I remarked, I always have a way of my own, from which I never like to deviate. Now, do me the favour to take my pocket-book from my coat pocket, my unfortunate wound"—the Colonel again winced with pain—"has lamed my right arm and hand completely."

Mr. Green expressed his sympathy in the warmest terms, carefully pulled the pocket-book from the veteran's coat, opened it at the latter's desire, and from four or five new notes took one, which the Colonel requested him to keep. Mr. Green wrote off a receipt, and placed it in the old pocket-book, which he then very carefully restored to its resting place. He then assisted the Colonel to enter the carriage, and the groom—Colonel Green could not drive on account of his injured arm—rapidly drove off in the direction of Leicester Square. The jeweller, though much overjoyed, was a cautious business man, and, notwithstanding the considerable deposit, proceeded to make his safety certain.

In the "War List" he readily found the name and rank of his customer, just as they had been given, and from the estate agent who rented out the splendid mansion in Leicester Square he had ascertained that it had recently been occupied by Colonel James Green, of the Guards, and that the latter had brought the most excellent recommendations from his banker, and sundry other distinguished personages.

In the course of three weeks, at the end of which the set was to be done, the Colonel often came into the shop to see how the work was going on, and always discoursed so affably with the goldsmith that the latter could not find sufficient words of praise for his genial customer when speaking to others about him. At last the service was completed. It was placed upon a large table and covered with a cloth of blue velvet. Punctual at the stipulated time in the afternoon Colonel Green entered the shop, his excellent carriage with the spirited horses remaining before the door in care of the groom.

The officer stepped into the room, and Mr. Green, swelling with pride, removed the velvet cloth from the service. The Colonel, though usually a quiet man, declared that it surpassed his expectations, and insisted upon paying the entire one thousand five hundred pounds, and also upon the jeweller retaining the deposit of one hundred pounds as a *douceur* for the satisfaction he had given.

"Now to business," said the Colonel. "Be so kind as to take out my pocket-book and count off your one thousand five hundred pounds, for I do not wish to tarry a moment before showing your *chef d'œuvre* to my wife."

The jeweller hastened to comply. He took from the officer's breast coat pocket a card-case, a set of ivory tablets, and a silk purse, through whose meshes glittered some five or six sovereigns, but no pocket-book. Upon the Colonel's request he then examined all of his pockets. The search was futile.

"Strange. Incomprehensible. Could I have lost it, or been robbed?" muttered the Colonel, audibly perplexed and provoked. "What o'clock is it?" he suddenly asked.

"Twenty minutes to five."

"Good; it is time enough. You must make yourself serviceable to me once more, my dear Mr. Green, and act as my secretary. You know I cannot use my right hand. Will you have the goodness to write a few lines for me to my wife?"

With these words the Colonel stepped to the jeweller's desk, on which lay some writing paper, printed with the name of the firm. Taking a sheet, he placed it before the jeweller, saying: "This will do; my wife knows that I am here." He then dictated, and the jeweller wrote:

My Dear Wife,—Have the goodness to send me at once fifteen hundred pounds, through the bearer. You know where the money is kept. I am in immediate need of it; therefore, do not detain the messenger, who is a trustworthy person.

Your affectionate husband,

James Green.

"Thank you," said the Colonel, after perusing the epistle. "Michael," he cried, "take this letter, drive home as fast as you can, and return at once to this place with that which my wife will give you."

The groom took the letter, bowed, and quickly went off.

Fifteen minutes, a half-hour, nearly an hour passed away, and Michael did not return. The Colonel waxed impatient, and wished that he had gone in person for the money. The jeweller essayed to tranquillise him, but ineffectually.

The Colonel could contain himself no longer.

"Do me the favour, Mr. Green, to call a cab," he said, in the greatest impatience. "I shall go home myself and will return within half an hour."

The cab drove off as rapidly as the horse could go. The goldsmith meantime had the service packed up, and then waited for his patron's return. The clock struck six, seven, eight, nine. The Colonel did not come. Something unusual must have detained him; but the jeweller felt no anxiety, for had he not still the service and a deposit of one hundred pounds?

Tired of waiting, at last he closed his shop at half-past nine, and went home. His wife who had long been expecting him, had grown sleepy, and was slumbering on a sofa. An open letter lay in her lap. Mr. Green stepped lightly to her, intending to wake her with a kiss, when his eye fell upon the letter.

"What is this?" he cried dumfounded, as he recognised his own handwriting and the letter he had just written for the Colonel.

The reader can readily guess the sequel and the connection.

True, there existed a right Colonel Green, who had served in India, and had been wounded at Tel-el-Kebir, who had rented a house in Leicester Square, and who possessed a considerable fortune, but, alas, he was not the Colonel Green who had ordered the silver service.

The man personating the groom, of course, was an accomplice, and the letter which Mr. James Green had penned for the pseudo Colonel James Green, was delivered by him to the jeweller's wife, who did not hesitate a minute to deliver to him the fifteen hundred pounds, because she recognised her husband's handwriting upon the paper stamped with the name of the jeweller's firm. Who the rogues were never came to light.

M. L.

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GOLDEN ✱ STAR.

- - A Romance - -

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

PROLOGUE.

The Bridal of Vilcaroya and Golden Star.

Far and wide throughout the vast empire of the Incas had spread the momentous news of the coming of the mysterious strangers whose advent had been prophesied generation after generation from the remote ages in which Manco Capac and Mama Occlu, first Children of the Sun, had journeyed northward from the great lake of the south, bearing the golden wedge which, according to the divine promise, had sunk out of sight into the earth when they reached the northern end of the valley of Cuzco and so marked the site of the city which, in after ages, was to be the home of the Children of the Sun.

It was the eve of the great festival of the Raymi, that day on which the sun, rising from his grave in the north, greeted with golden promises of reborn splendour the eyes of his chosen children. The last sun of winter had set, and to-morrow the great feast would be held, and yet not held as of yore, as, indeed, it might never be held again, for the hearts of the Children of the Sun were heavy with the forebodings of evil times to come and the too well-grounded belief that, though on the morrow the sun might rise in all its accustomed splendour over the guardian mountains of Cuzco, and flood the glorious valley of gardens with the same rivers of light which for ages had flowed along its verdant shores, that other sun of empire which had shone undimmed in the zenith of power for twenty generations had already begun to decline towards the nadir from which it might never rise again.

From all parts of the empire the worst of tidings had been fast flowing in through the four portals of the City of the Sun. News at once as mysterious as it was momentous. The air was full of forebodings, and men's hearts were failing them for fear of the things that were soon to come to pass. All over the great city, in the houses and the streets and the squares, groups of men and women were talking in the low tones of fearful apprehension of the wondrous things that had come to pass within the last few moons—things which no man had dreamed of, which no man had believed possible, so marvellous and unheard of were they. Was the end of all things coming? Was the golden dream of the Inca empire to end in the awakening of a grey morning of sorrow and strife, forerunner of the black darkness of a night of everlasting ruin?

Was the great dominion, which had been fashioned by the hands of the Celestials who had descended from the sun and had spread from beyond the southern shores of the great lake to the impassable mountains of the north, to wither away in the grasp of the mysterious beings who had come from beyond the portals of the sun? Were the long generations of uninterrupted conquest without and of unbroken peace and ever-growing prosperity within to end in the gloom of defeat and the chaos of irretrievable ruin?

All the portents foretold that it should be so, and the hearts of the Children of the Sun were heavy with the apprehension of coming sorrows. For three days the great city had fasted, neither fire nor light had been kindled within its precincts, and now the last hours of the fast had come. To-morrow the sun himself would tell them whether the portents were to be realised in very truth or whether those who had read them had erred in their reading.

The hour of midnight had long passed, the great central Sanctuary of the House of the Sun was filled with the descendants of his earliest children, who stood ranged in silent ranks along its two sides. On the one hand stood the sons and on the other the daughters of the sacred race, and above them, under the great golden cornice that ran round its walls, sat in twenty niches on either side facing each other, the mummies of the fathers and mothers of twenty generations of Incas looking down through the eye-holes of their golden masks upon this, the last gathering of their faithful children.

At the western end rose from a flight of broad, low steps, paved alternately with plates of gold and silver, the great Altar of the Sun—a huge block of black sienite, on which burnt the eternal fire fed every year with the sacred fleece kindled by the Sun himself without the aid of human hands. Above this was the great image of the Sun, a vast circular plate of gold fashioned in the form of a human face, with great diamonds for eyes, rubies for lips, with emerald pendants hanging from the ears, and all round it a halo of curving rays of gold thick-set with jewels that glittered each with its hundred rays of light in the rising and falling flame of the altar fire. In front of this, at the eastern end of the sanctuary, was a great circular window, through which the rays of the rising sun would fall, first

On the one hand stood the sons and on the other the daughters.

upon its image over the altar, and then on the great golden vessel at the bottom of which lay the sacred fleece, which its concentrated rays should set on fire.

In front of the altar, on the highest step, stood Anda-Huillac, High Priest of the Sun, and brother of the great Huayni Capac, who had spread the empire of his ancestors from the deserts of Chili to Quito, the great city of the north, and from the Cordilleras of the east to the shoreless

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ocean of the west. The fourth hour of the morning had been called, and ere long the eastern sky would be brightened by the coming of the heralds of the dawn.

All lights, save the sacred altar fire, had been extinguished. For many minutes a breathless silence had reigned throughout the sanctuary, for the Villac Umu had been standing with his head bowed over the altar and his arms uplifted as though in supplication to the image of the Deity. At length his arms sank down until his hands were buried in the folds of his flowing robe. He turned round and faced the silent ranks on either side of him, with the flickering flames behind him outlining a figure full of weird and almost unearthly majesty.

Then he raised his arms again, at once in supplication to the Deity and in blessing on those who stood before him, and broke the long silence with an invocation to the Sun-God, in the concluding words of which the whole audience joined in a low, many-voiced whisper which sent its weird echoes murmuring among the niches where the dead Incas and their consorts sat, as though they were whispering in the ears that had so long been deaf to all earthly sounds. Then for a moment there was silence again, and then the Villac Umu spoke again:

"Children of the Sun, and sons and daughters of the long line of conquerors who, in the ages that are forgotten, received the divine command to create the empire over which your ancestors have ruled with ever-growing glory—to me, the last of my sacred line, has fallen by the inscrutable decrees of the Lord of the Universe, our common father, the Sun, the awful task of telling you that the day of our empire is past, and that the night of ruin is fast approaching."

He paused for a moment, and from the ranks on either side of him there came a low murmuring wail, half of fear and half of wonder, for though the lips of the High Priest of the Sun were believed to voice the very thoughts of Deity itself, these tidings seemed to them too marvellous and too fearful for belief. He waited till the wail had died out into the silence again and then he went on:

"Yes, alas, it is too truly so, for the auguries, which cannot lie, have told the tale, and the voices of the stars themselves have confirmed it. When the great Inca Yupanqui heard the summons that called him home to the mansions of the Sun he foretold, speaking with the lore that is given to men only when they stand between the sunset of to-day and the dawn of to-morrow, in the midst of the brief passage which leads from this life to the next, that when the imperial Llautu should adorn the brow of two Incas in the Land of the Four Regions, and when the hostile hands of two brothers should grasp the sceptre of the divine Manco, there should come strangers from the north and the east armed with thunder and flame, and terrors unknown to the Children of the Sun, who, through the gateway opened by the strife of brothers, and the divisions of the people who were one, should march through fire and blood to a chaos of ruin and desolation in which all the long glories of the Incas should be buried.

"Now the eve of that day has come. You know how the sons of the great Huayni Capac, Huascar and Atahuallpa, have drenched the Land of the Sun with the blood of its children in their unholy strife for empire. You know how both have worn the Llautu, the one in the south and the other in the north, and how in the midst of their strife the strangers came, few in number but irresistible in might, and seized Atahuallpa in the midst of his conquering armies; how Huascar fell beneath the assassin's knife but a few days ago; and you know, too, how now this great City, with all its priceless treasures, lies open to the ravages of our conquerors."

Another wail broke, half stifled, from the trembling lips of his auditors. It sobbed itself away into silence among the echoes, and he went on, speaking now in a somewhat higher tone, through which sounded something like a note of hope:

"But yet one augury is wanting to make the prophecy complete. If when the hour of dawn comes our Lord and Father, the Sun, shall rise with his accustomed splendour and look through his portal yonder with a kindly eye upon us, his waiting children; if he shall greet us as of yore, and if the sacred fleece shall once more burst into flame under the burning light of his ardent eyes, then all hope is not lost, and the sorrows of to-day may melt away as the mists on the mountain tops dissolve ere the snowy peaks grow rosy red in the light of dawn. But if not, then the worst is certain, and so must be prepared for.

"But even then, though hope must die in the present, yet, as the stars have said, it may be revived in the future. For this the Golden Chain, the symbol of the unity of our empire and the image of that mystic bond which unites earth with heaven and the Sun with his children, must be saved from the polluting touch of the stranger and the oppressor, and with it must go into a place of secure hiding the best and greatest of those treasures of gold and silver and jewels, the report of whose priceless worth has lured these ruthless ravagers from afar.

Then he raised his arms again.

"There they shall go, nay, many of them have already gone, under the care of my brethren and myself, to a place where none shall find them save those to whom we give the secret. But in the inscrutable wisdom of the powers that rule all human destiny, it has been ordained that only the hand of one who has been dead and shall be alive again shall draw them forth from their hiding-place. Only to such an one may be intrusted the secret of the hidden treasures, and with that secret the glorious task of restoring in another and perhaps distant age the ancient glories of the Children of the Sun.

"Now, who is he amongst you, if, indeed, there be one, who of his own free will will take this awful task upon himself—who will go through the gates of Death and dwell awhile in the shadowland that lies between this world and the Mansions of the Sun, who will take that dreadful secret with him into the grave, yet in the perfect faith and certain hope that some day he will come forth into the world of living men again, to perform the rest of the task which he has taken upon himself?"

He ceased speaking, and a long silence followed. In the pale flickering light of the altar flame, the Children of the Sun looked at each other wide-eyed in wonder at the strange words that they had heard, as though mutely ask-

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ing which of them would undertake a task of which the first condition was death. Then from the ranks of the women a young girl stepped out, fair-skinned and golden-haired, with deep blue eyes that shone darkly in the light of the sacred fire as she approached it. She went to the foot of the altar steps, and, kneeling on the lowest of them, stretched out her arms above her head and said:

"O, priest of the Sun, and brother of His brother, thou hast asked if there is a man here who will dare and do this great and awful task of which thou hast told us, and I am but a girl who is hardly yet a woman. Yet the noblest of the sons of our divine race, aye, even the Inca Huascar himself, have sought in vain to win my favour. Now, I kneel here before the altar of the Sun and the sacred emblem of our ancient faith, and swear by it and the souls of our ancestors, who are looking down upon us, that with him who shall dare this thing I will wed in the chambers of Death and go down into the grave itself, well satisfied that in him the prophecy shall be fulfilled, and that when the awakening summons comes he and I will return to the halls of life, he to be the father, and I the mother, of those new children of the Sun in whom shall be restored the glories that are about to be taken from us."

A young girl stepped out.

Scarcely had the last words left her trembling lips than another figure sank on its knees beside her. Two other hands went up with hers, and the deep music of a man's voice uplifted to the pitch of ecstasy rang clearly through the gloom of the great sanctuary, and said:

"There is no death that the love of woman cannot conquer, nor any danger that shall not be dared to win such love as thine, O Golden Star! Lo! I will go with thee, for I love thee, and the grave hath no terrors if thou wilt go with me to its brink. Whether to wake again on earth or in the Mansions of the Sun, I will sleep the sleep of death with thee, and if it shall please our Father the Sun to recall us to mortal life in some other age, I swear by his glory to devote that new life to thy love and his service, and love and life and all that shall be mine to the restoration of the ancient glories of the Children of the Sun. Now I have sworn this for love of thee, O Golden Star, wilt thou accept my oath, and put thy hand in mine and be my bride in death and in the life that is to be?"

There was silence again for a little space, and then Golden Star's right hand stole out and found a resting-place in one stretched out to meet it. She turned her head for a moment and raised her eyes till they met those of the man kneeling beside her. A faint flush rose in her cheeks, and her lips parted in a smile as she answered:

"Yes, I will take thine oath and thy love, most willingly, O Vilcaroya, for there is no other of the sons of the Sun with whom I would so gladly go, whether to life or death, as with thee; and thou hast proved thyself worthy of the love that has been hidden until now, for thou alone of all here hast had the faith and boldness to believe the prophecy and venture all upon its truth. Thou art mine, and I am thine, for death or life, for the grave that is so near, and the empire that may be afar off."

"Well said, true son and daughter of our sacred race," said the Villac Umu, in solemn tones, spreading his hands out over them in blessing as they knelt before him, "for the lives that you give now, devoted to death in the faith and hope that shall not be betrayed, our Divine Father shall give you other lives better and brighter than those of to-day. You shall take the secrets of our doomed race, and the key to our most precious treasures into a place of safe keeping; and in the appointed time you shall bring them forth again, and through them in you, if you are but faithful to your trust, shall be restored the ancient splendours of the empire of the Children of the Sun. Now let your hearts and the hearts of all here melt and mingle in silence, for our Lord and Father approaches to make manifest his will unto his children."

As the priest ceased he pointed to the eastern window beyond which the sky was whitening and brightening with the swiftly coming dawn. Every face was turned towards it for an instant, then all with a single movement prostrated themselves on the floor of the sanctuary. Only the priest remained standing, and he stood on the lowest step between Golden Star and Vilcaroya with clasped hands and head thrown back, the fading glimmer of the altar behind him, and the fast growing light of the dawn falling on his pale upturned face and long silver hair.

Amidst utter silence the light brightened fast till a sun-ray shot over the lower rim of the window and shone on the golden rafters of the roof. Foot by foot it crept along the rooftree, broadening and brightening as it went, till it touched the western wall. Then, followed by the anxious eyes of the silent throng, it descended until the great Symbol of the sun flamed and flashed with new born radiance. Then the great polished golden concave, at the bottom of which lay the Sacred Fleece, began to glow with the concentrated rays, and the moment for the giving of the heaven-sent sign had come. Then something—cloud or mist or vapour drifting through the crystal air—passed over the face of the sun, and the glowing focus of rays in the golden concave grew dim for an instant. A faint wreath of pale-blue smoke curled round the Sacred Fleece and vanished.

The haze passed away from the face of the sun, but the moment had gone by. The golden vessel grew dim as the rays left it one by one. A last sunbeam fell on the figure of the high priest and the heads of the pair that knelt before him. Then the sun's disc passed beyond the upper rim of the window. An oval shape of light swept slowly along the floor between the two prostrate files till it vanished like the symbol of the departing glory of the empire that was soon to be no more. The altar fire leapt upward once, then fell and flickered out. A wail of sorrow and despair broke from the pale lips of the Children of the Sun, and sobbed away into silence as Anda-Huillac threw his hands aloft again, and cried:

"The Sun himself hath spoken, and the doom of his children is certain. The Sacred Fleece lies cold, unkindled by the smile that has never been denied till now. The fire that was lit by celestial hands is quenched, and the last hour of the long empire of the Incas is struck. It is for us to save what may be saved, and then meet the fate assigned to us by our lord and father like true and faithful children submissive to his will. Rise now sons and daughters of the Sun, last heirs of our glories and first inheritors of our shame and sorrow! Bear witness to what has been said and done this night; and you Vilcaroya and Golden Star make ready to fulfil the oath that you have sworn, and to take your sacred charge through the shadows that are already gathering on the brink of your common grave from which, if the Divine Powers permit, you shall come forth again to life and love and glory, and the gloom that is falling upon

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the Land of the Sun shall have passed away in the dawn of a brighter age!"

As he ceased speaking he descended from the altar steps, and with down-bent head and hands crossed on his breast, walked with slow steps down between the silent files towards the eastern door of the sanctuary, followed by Golden Star and Vilcaroya hand in hand. Then, two and two, the bright-haired Virgins of the Sun filed out after them, and after these went in the same order the sons of the Sun, the flower of the Inca manhood, leaving the sanctuary cold and dark and deserted, with the ashes of the sacred fire lying cold upon the altar of a dying faith.

The feast of Raymi passed in gloom and silence only broken by the low wailings of mourners bemoaning the gloomy portents of the speedy fulfilment of which there seemed now to be no possible doubt. The Sun, their father and their god had veiled his face at the very moment when they looked most eagerly and anxiously for the kindly glance which was to promise light and life, and peace for yet another year

All that day Golden Star and Vilcaroya fasted and prayed in preparation for the solemn ordeal that awaited them at night, and at sunset the Villac Umu took them back into the sanctuary and there in the presence of a great gathering of the priests of the Sun they repeated their oaths and plighted their death-troth once more. Then two priests brought out the marriage-font and placed it between them as they stood before the altar. It was a double vessel of gold composed of two shallow cups divided by a partition which was pierced by a single hole. The cup on Vilcaroya's side was filled with a deep blood-red liquid, and the one towards Golden Star with crystal clear water. The hole in the partition was stopped with a golden plug to which was attached a little chain. The high priest joined their hands over the mystic vessel and drew out the plug. Immediately the two liquids began to mingle, and as they did so, the priest said in a low clear voice:

The high priest joined their hands over the vessel.

"Here Vilcaroya and Golden Star, son and daughter of the Sun, see the emblem of the solemn union between you. As the strong red wine tinges and strengthens the pure water, so, Golden Star, shall the stronger nature of thy husband colour and strengthen thine, and as the pure water tempers and purifies the ruddy wine, so, Vilcaroya, shall the gentler and purer nature of her who is now thy wife soften and purify thine, according to the will and purpose of our Father the Sun, who to this end sent man and woman upon the earth, that together they might possess and enjoy it, each helping the other, man making the earth fruitful and beautiful by his labour, and woman sweetening his toil by the reward of her love and constancy."

Still holding their clasped hands over the mingling fluids, symbol of their now united lives, the wedded lovers who had known each other's love but for a day, heard the priests chant the marriage song, and then with blanching cheeks and suddenly aching hearts heard the cheerful strains change into the mournful cadences of the dirge for the dead. When these died away the high priest took the golden vase from the altar. Still with clasped hands they turned and faced him. He held it before them, and said, in a voice at length shaken by the strength of his emotion:

First went the Villac Umu and the twelve priests.

"Son and daughter, man and wife, who have sworn to lead each other through the shadows, whose eyes must soon close on the untasted joys of your most holy union perchance to open upon the things of a better and a brighter age—this is the draught of death which yet may not be death for you. Drink it in the fulfilment of your oaths and in pledge of the faith you have professed in the truth of the prophecy and of the loving mercy of your father the Sun."

He gave the vase to Vilcaroya, who raised it to his lips with unshaking hand and drank half of the pale golden fluid that it contained. Then he gave it to Golden Star, but now his hands trembled and he saw her take it and drain it with eyes that looked through a mist of tears. Then the high priest took the empty goblet in silence and laid it on the altar, and then hand in hand the bride and bridegroom of death were led by the Villac Umu and the twelve chief priests of the Sun to the bridal couch that had been prepared for them in an inner chamber of the sanctuary.

There they lay down side by side in their splendid bridal robes, and the priests standing round began to chant the marriage song again, but this time in the slow and slumberous cadences of the death chant. When the song ere long had died away in silence Vilcaroya and Golden Star lay with closed eyes and gently heaving breasts, sleeping the long sleep which, unless a miracle was wrought, should for them know no waking.

At midnight a long procession moved silently and swiftly out of the western gate of the City of the Sun. First went the Villac Umu and the twelve priests, then came two closed litters each borne by eight bearers, and each containing a recumbent, motionless form. After these came a long line of men walking about six feet apart, and over their shoulders, right and left alternately, lay what looked like a huge rope wrapped in folds of woollen cloth. Yet it could hardly have been a rope, for it hung down too heavily and swung too regularly between the bearers, and when every now and then others stepped in from the two files and walked alongside to relieve them there was a sound of metal clinking musically upon metal.

The procession left the city amidst the tears and prayers of a silent multitude of the Children of the Sun, and filed out into the plain towards the western mountains, and was lost in the darkness. Ten days later the Villac Umu and the twelve chief priests returned. The litters and the long, strange burden and all their bearers had vanished, nor were any of them ever seen again by the eyes of that generation of the Children of the Sun.

(End of the Prologue.)

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One of the leading lights of a certain small country parish in Virginia was the zealous young man rejoicing in the name of the Rev. Josiah Meeking, who presided over the local chapel and looked upon himself as responsible for the moral principles of his congregation.

In addition to being a zealous worker he was not without his ambitions, one of them being to shine in the ranks of literature. Possibly the fact that his salary was small and he had heard that there was money to be made by writing stories, may have had something to do with his desire to become an author.

His fate—he persuaded himself—lay in the direction of stories having a moral attached to them, and for a long time he racked his brains for a suitable plot in which the hero, after being subjected to all sorts of trials and temptations, emerged triumphant in the end and became a noted character for the rest of his life.

Somehow the idea didn't work out as he could have wished. Whenever he had thought of a really good plot, it occurred to him that he had heard or read something very much like it before, and reference to the selection of volumes comprising the parish library generally proved his surmise to have been correct.

By continual reference in this way he became intimately associated with the titles of nearly every story in the library, and he was surprised to find what a number had to do with boys and girls—were written apparently for their sole edification and benefit, further than this there was a marvellous sameness about them when compared with each other, one of the most favourite themes being a wolf story, the scene of which was, he observed, almost always laid in Russia.

Here was an opportunity; he would write a wolf story, but change the venue to his own district, and make his hero one of his own countrymen.

The next thing to be done was to get the nucleus of a plot, something new and original, but at the same time working in the old familiar details.

Quite by chance one day, he noticed an advertisement of a book entitled, "How to Write a Story," and promptly sent for a copy. When he received it he imagined his difficulties were practically at an end, but after reading it through carefully he felt bound to confess that he was not much nearer his goal than before.

The little work, excellent in its way, afforded no end of hints to would-be writers of fiction as to how they should commence, develop, and finish off a story; but what the Rev. Josiah needed was a plot, and this simple matter of detail strange as it may appear had apparently been deemed unworthy of the writer's notice. There was, however, one gleam of hope; in the appendix was the following suggestion: "Young authors will often find the means of inspiration for literary efforts by perusing the daily newspapers. Many an excellent plot may by this means be evolved."

The Rev. Josiah once more hied him to the parish reading-room and anxiously scanned the contents of every paper he could lay his hands upon. For a while he worked in vain, and then his eye lighted on a short paragraph narrating that a man, recently deceased, who had in his time fought for his country, was wont to narrate how in one battle in which he was engaged, he was struck by an enemy's bullet, and that his life was saved from the fact that he had always made it a practice, in addition to his ordinary military equipment, to carry a Testament in the left breast of his tunic; and the bullet, which he ever after retained as a memento of his marvellous escape, found its progress to his heart, or somewhere thereabouts, arrested by this shield of protection, to which he owed his life.

Here was a suggestion at last; he would make his hero—an eminently good young man—go through life with a prayer-book somewhere about him. He could not very well always have it in his pocket, as wolves did not usually go for a man's pocket, he fancied, but for the throat of their victims—at least, all the stories he had read attributed this proceeding to them.

Obviously his hero could not go about the world with a prayer-book, like a charm, hung around his neck; and for a brief while the incompatibility of the thing staggered him.

Suddenly an inspiration struck him, and he wondered why he had not thought of it before; he would make his hero carry his prayer-book, not too bulky a one, in his outside coat tail pocket and then when the pursuing wolf had gained upon him, and was just about to make his fatal spring, he would valiantly face him, holding his shield of protection in front of his throat.

The brute would spring and find his teeth embedded in the book. It was to have limp leather covers as being more likely to serve his purpose than the board ones which turned the bullet, and in case this meal of literature was not sufficient, his hero, an exemplary young man, should have his various pockets well filled with religious books and tracts of a bulky and satisfying nature so that if the prayer-book failed to effect its object in the way of warding off the wolf's attack, there would be a reserve of ammunition as it were to hurl at him, until at length mad with rage and impotence at being unable to reach his victim's throat, the wolf would desist. Great stress it will be observed was to be placed on the exact portion of the human anatomy to be attacked.

Having at length worked out the incidents of the plot to his entire satisfaction, the Rev. Josiah Meeking retired to rest, well satisfied in his mind, and with a secret inward conviction that the gates of fame were about to open to him, and that a comfortable addition to his small stipend might reasonably be looked for in the immediate future.

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The hero, a man of small stature, but indomitable courage, was to be a young clergyman living near the banks of a large lake in a wild and sparsely populated district; in addition to his own parish he had occasionally to do duty in another some miles distant, and in winter time, the whole surface of the vast lake being frozen over, he would be in the habit of making the journey between the two places on skates. It was to be in one of these expeditions, when returning at night after taking an afternoon service, that the terrific encounter between man and wolf was to be brought about.

The story was to read something like this:

The whole surface of the vast watery expanse was as smooth as glass, a few clouds drifted in the blue sky overhead, but the Rev. Abraham Smirke noted them not, for, as he sped on his homeward way, conscious of having done a good day's work, his thoughts were busily centred in the all-absorbing problem of his life, how he was to raise the necessary funds for building the new church of which his rapidly increasing flock was sadly in need.

Even while his mind was thus busily engaged, his thoughts were divided as it were, and being an expert skater, and withal possessed of excellent eyesight, he read as he sped along out of a theological work, one of several, in addition to a whole bundle of tracts which it was his custom to carry about with him in his daily peregrinations. For be it understood the Rev. Smirke was regarded by all who knew him as an exemplary young man in every respect, and no one in his community had ever dared to say so much as a word against him.

By degrees the light failed, and, realising that he had yet many miles to traverse before he would be in sight of his humble lodging, he, not without a sigh, placed in his outside overcoat pocket the work he had been reading—"Holy Living"—and set to vigorously to accomplish the remainder of the journey before nightfall. For had it not been rumoured that owing to the severity of the winter wolves from the adjoining woods had latterly become so emboldened as to leave the security of their retreats and approach the confines of civilisation.

Ha! what was that? a low ominous howl arrested his attention, and as he turned his head without for a moment relaxing his efforts to keep up the speed he was travelling at, he saw following immediately in his track an enormous wolf which he judged could not be more than a quarter of a mile distant. Full seven miles off was the the house he lived in, but before that there was a small tavern, and if he could only reach it before the wolf he would be saved. Fear lent energy to his legs, and his skates rang out as they skimmed over the frozen surface in a way they had never done before. He looked back; the wolf was unmistakably gaining on him, and he could see the open mouth and cruel hungry fangs waiting as it seemed to devour him.

For the first time in his life, the habit he had of carrying a small library of religious works about with him, weighed upon his mind, or, to be more correct, upon his body, the "Holy Living" in his overcoat pocket especially making its presence uncomfortably felt by banging about against his legs.

For a moment the thought entered his mind to throw it away, but almost instantly he repented of having allowed such an idea to even temporarily take possession of him, and he sped on, encumbered though he was.

On came the wolf, with that long galloping stride (for description of how wolves do gallop when pursuing belated travellers *vide* any popular story-book) and was evidently gaining on his victim, yard by yard. To make matters worse for the reverend gentleman a stiff breeze had lately sprung up—a side wind, too—which not only made progression more difficult, but also caused the various volumes in his different pockets to wobble about and flap against his legs more than ever.

The temptation to discard "Holy Living" again made itself felt, and he is on the point of throwing it from him in the hopes that it may, momentarily at all events, serve to distract the wolves attention, when he sees before him at no great distance a long slender black object lying on the ice. "Thank Heaven!" he ejaculates to himself, "it must be a gun, or failing that a stout staff. If I can but gain it my life may yet be spared." He has almost come up with it when the wolf makes a mighty spring, not at the horrified man's throat, as had been the writer's intention, it will be remembered, but at the nearest spot available, which happened to be the outflying coat-tail in the pocket of which reposed "Holy Living."

There is a sound as of a mighty tear, the coat—excellent material as it was—(the author had felt half inclined to work in an advertisement here, but on reflection came to the conclusion it would detract from the otherwise highly moral tone of the story) the coat as has been said, unable to stand the strain, gave way; the lower portion of the garment, including the good book, remaining embedded in the wolf's hungry and capacious maw. Mr. Smirke, released by the sudden severance, fell forwards on his face and immediately on top of the dark object already referred to, which, with wondrous presence of mind, he managed to secure. It proves to be a stout oaken stave. Armed with this, and with the powerful consciousness of having resisted temptation at a time of direst extremity, he turns to face his foe, with that undaunted courage which had ever been one of his main characteristics.

The wolf is sprawling on the ice, panting convulsively at the air. His fangs had closed over the overcoat just where "Holy Living" was reposing in the tail pocket, and thus having become embedded in that excellent, but somewhat weighty volume, he was powerless to make any further attack. With a single blow of the trusty oak, Mr. Smirke puts him *hors de combat*, and heartily congratulates himself on not having yielded to temptation at what had, he felt, been one of the most trying moments of his life.

Finally, he earned the gratitude of his community by killing the ferocious beast, to say nothing of the pecuniary reward from the State for so doing.

Such in brief was the outline—omitting the abundant supply of padding—of the Rev. Josiah Meeking's first effort at literary composition.

It was, he felt, little short of sublime, the moral it taught being sufficient to insure its acceptance at the hands of the editor of a certain religious weekly publication to whose care he lost no time in consigning it.

Now, as often happens, the publishing offices of the paper in question were also those of a periodical of an altogether different type, the contributors to which were not altogether renowned for their piety, but rather the reverse—a decidedly worldly paper, in fact—and one whose sole aim and desire was to excite risibility in its readers, rather than convey a moral to adorn a tale.

And it chanced that by some unaccountable blunder Mr. Smirke's MS. found itself on the editorial table of the humorous publication, instead of the religious one for which it was intended.

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In due course it was opened and read, the address on the cover not being noticed, and before the editor had proceeded far, he saw that it was not quite the sort of story for his journal, but he smiled to himself as he read on, and the idea suggested itself to him that with a little careful revision it might be made to do duty exceedingly well.

A few days later the Rev. Mr. Smirke was no less surprised than gratified to receive a notification that his story was accepted, and would appear in due course. Meanwhile, in accordance with the rule, payment was forwarded; a cheque for a guinea and a half—exactly a guinea more than Mr. Smirke had dared to hope for—was inclosed.

Weeks passed by, and although Mr. Smirke had contemplated writing a second story, he had not done so, being desirous to see how his first venture would be criticised.

One day he received a copy of the *Humorous Joker!* Mechanically tearing it open, what was his surprise to find *his* story occupying a prominent position in its pages.

He could hardly believe his eyes, but there it was right enough, and if anything were necessary to convince him it was the fact that the opening sentences, on which he had particularly prided himself, were left exactly as he had written them, a piece of discernment on the editor's part for which he felt highly gratified, and resolved to write and tell him so. But as he went on his face changed, as well it might; for if the editor had been content to leave the opening part alone, he had taken most unwarrantable liberties with the action of the plot in its most exciting episodes. This is what he read:

"On came the wolves" (wolves, indeed! he had only described one wolf!), "their mouths gaping wide open as they viewed with avidity the literary treat in store for them, for, in addition to his usual impedimenta in the way of clothing, including a long overcoat, the Rev. Jonas Sleeke had loaded himself with a small library of religious books, not necessary to be read so much as a profession of the faith that was within him. Tracts, missionary reports, and the rest, all served to swell his pockets, and at the same time retard his progress.

"Still he kept resolutely on, and the temptation which assailed him to throw some of his cargo away, in the hopes of distracting the wolves' attention—our readers will remember something of this sort has been worked into a story before: then it was a bad Russian woman who threw her children one by one (she seems to have had a large family) to ward off the wolves' attack from herself; but we let this pass—the thought occurred, we remark, to Mr. Sleeke to attempt to distract the wolves' attention by tract distribution, at which he had always been proficient, but he immediately put it from him; arguing that it would be wrong to waste upon brute beast what had been the means of gaining him a character for piety and devotion; and further, he thought to himself, with a chuckle, that if the wolves continued to keep their mouths open much longer in the face of the keen wind that was blowing, added to the fact of the thermometer being several degrees below zero, they would in all probability be unable to close them again, as they would be frozen open! And then being incapable of attacking him they would fall an easy victim to his prowess, and better still he would obtain a satisfactory pecuniary reward from the State for the destruction of each one.

"Buoyed up with this pleasant vision, he urges on his wild career, notwithstanding that his movements are sadly hampered by his load of goody goody literature; but still he perseveres, for it would never do, after years of exemplary conduct, to throw away his credentials as it were.

"In front of him he sees something—what it is he knows not—it may be a gun, possibly a big German sausage—whatever it is he will strive to reach it, and he does. At last he is almost upon it, when the three foremost of the pack of wolves, as if actuated by one common impulse, make a mighty spring at him. One seizes his overcoat by the left tail, the other by the right, and the third goes for the centre of the skirt. One and all succeed in getting a firm hold, and there is a tearing sound which results in the garment giving way. Mr. Sleeke falls forward upon the black object, which is not a gun or a sausage, but a stout ebony cane, since we understand identified as belonging to a member of Mr. Sleeke's congregation. But how it came to be upon the ice in that particular spot, unless the worthy member had been paying a surreptitious visit to a certain tavern in the neighbourhood, and had dropped it on his way home, we are unable to say.

"At any rate there it was, and armed therewith and using it as a ramrod, Mr. Sleeke felt safe—for are not the wolves rolling on their backs, convulsively pawing at the air? The literary feast had disagreed with them, one and all. They had got their teeth embedded either in a good book, a missionary report, or a tract, and they were powerless to attack the pale but resolute man in front of them. The remainder of the pack, true to the traditions of their species, when they saw the leaders in difficulties had slunk away, leaving their companions to their fate.

"And what did Mr. Sleeke do? Did he hesitate? No! A thousand times, no! Endowed with that indomitable courage which had ever been one of his chief characteristics, and realising, probably, that the rapidly suffocating animals could not possibly do him any injury, he hastily took a bundle of remaining tracts from one pocket, and using his trusty stick as a rammer, proceeded to load the throat of wolf number one until he succumbed; and then performed the same humane operation to numbers two and three.

"And as he looked at his three vanquished and now defunct foes, and realised the good deed he had done, and the prospective reward in store for him from a grateful State, he felt a glow of satisfaction, and a feeling of deep gratitude almost overpowered him at the thought that in his direst extremities he had not given way to temptation.

"It is said, but we decline to believe it without convincing proof, that Mr. Sleeke so far forgot what was due to him as a Christian minister as to visit the neighbouring tavern and partake of certain alcoholic refreshment, his excuse being that the terrible ordeal he had undergone had completely unnerved him!"

* * * * *

At a meeting of the Rev. Josiah Meeking's flock shortly afterwards held, it was pointed out to him by an elder that admirable as might be the desire to seek fame and obtain emolument by the narration of fiction, it was not becoming in the person of a Christian minister to make mock of religion, and he was kindly invited to tender his resignation.

His next story will probably be of a different type.

S. J. F. Newbery.

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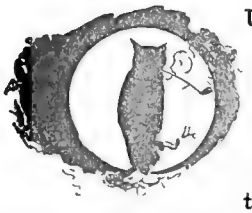
The People Across The Way



OUT of a full heart I tell this story.

The haunted house across the way was once a country residence, standing amid lawns and gardens and orchards and green fields, with a little village at its gate. But in time the village grew and encompassed it about and hemmed it in and swallowed up the orchards and green fields, and encroached upon the lawns and gardens, till of the broad lands there remained only a few scant acres. About these the owner built a high brick wall with a wicket gate, and then he died.

Those who came after chose to live elsewhere, and the house, which in days gone by had been a jolly house, became haunted from being untenanted. Years passed.

A rumour went abroad—the haunted house was rented at last. And the rumour was verified; for late one evening in early March, a closed carriage pulled up at the wicket gate, two female forms in black, closely veiled and followed by a woolly dog, stepped out, and the wicket gate closed on them. Upon inquiry I learnt that these were Mrs. and Miss Durand, French women of unknown antecedents, whose reasons for coming to Hallowell were, as yet, a mystery.

Strangers never came to Hallowell, as there was nothing in the town to attract them—neither the idler, the invalid, nor the artist; therefore the advent of madame and mademoiselle, as they came to be called, created something of a sensation. But it happened that only I and old Peggy, their cook, could bear witness to their life.

I was an idle fellow, with plenty of time and a good field-glass, and my window overlooked the high brick wall; therefore I soon learnt something of my neighbours. Madame was tall, of full figure, and had lost a tooth; further than this I took no immediate note; but mademoiselle—her mother called her Antoinette—was charming, beautiful! Her eyes were green like olives; her hair was red like sienna-tinted marsh grass in November; her skin resembled thick cream—as fine of texture and as colourless; and from the fact that there was a hint of that wondering youthfulness which the world wipes so soon from a woman's face, as a rude hand wipes the dust from a butterfly's wing, I guessed that she was not yet twenty. For the rest, her form, her voice, the grace of her body, her clothes—which, nevertheless, were very simple—and the way she wore them, were beyond the reach of pen and tongue.

Madame was a most devoted mother, mademoiselle a loving daughter. Madame was sometimes sad, mademoiselle was always gay. Both were industrious. Mademoiselle did the housekeeping, marketing, and shopping; madame affected gardening. Under her hand the scant acres blossomed as the rose; and so fascinated was she with her work that she never went abroad, except on occasional jaunts in the country with her daughter, whence they returned at twilight, laden with sweet spring flowers. At night they sat together in the porch, and mademoiselle, her head on madame's knee, sang *chansonettes* to a mandolin. Their life seemed to me most happy, innocent, and sweet.

And yet, since they went to no church, since—as told by Peggy, a prying gossip!—the hair of mademoiselle was made red by champagne, and—as told by Peggy, but denied by me—they drank much wine, and, oh, horror of horrors! smoked cigarettes after their late dinner, they were blackballed by the tradesmen's wives of Hallowell. But they were not altogether friendless. Mademoiselle gathered the little ragged children of the town, and held her *salon* in the sunny garden. Often have I watched her frolic with them in the mild spring weather, and sing to them, and tell them stories on the grass, under overhanging fruit trees which rained down scented petals on their heads.

But one day I discovered that life was not all sunshine for my charming mademoiselle. In a certain little wood near town, where flowers grow in wild luxuriance, and chestnut trees and oaks lift their long arms to the sky, I loved to wander with my dogs and books on pleasant Sunday mornings when all the world was on its knees in prayer. One day I came upon a woman sitting on a fallen tree and weeping, her white hands pressed against her face. In her lap was a bunch of wild azaleas, at her feet a woolly dog. Since there was no one in the world like her, I recognised mademoiselle.

Is there a man who understands the great mobility of a woman's nature? An hour later she arranged her azaleas on a little breakfast table in the garden. Her eyes glowed, her teeth gleamed through her parted lips—she was telling a good story to madame.

"Ah!" thought I, "there is a secret sorrow, and you take it to the wood, my pretty lady, that your mother may not see your tears!" I look back now and smile at my conclusion. Alas! some smiles are more bitter than tears!

I was a student and a dreamer, with a few thousands and no ambition. I was small, freckled, and insignificant in appearance, and—lacking the will to please my own sex, and the art to please the other—lived the life of any recluse, with my books, my flute, and my dog for company. I will not deny that, as time passed, I fell in love with mademoiselle, as needs must any man, indeed, who had peeped at her through a shutter's chink at intervals during one long season. When she wrapped her veil about her—she never went abroad without her veil—and tripped along the garden path and through the wicket gate, I seized my hat and followed after; when I passed her in the street I raised my hat, as is the custom of the town.

One day I met her in a grocer's shop. She was buying sausages, cheese, and other commonplace things. I was pretending to examine a box of cigars.

"You will send my basket at once, Mr. Brown?" she said, and turned to go.

The grocer scratched his head—it gave him pain to

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disoblige a customer—and explained, that since his boy was out, he feared it would be impossible.

Mademoiselle frowned slightly, and I, recognising my opportunity, came forward and said, with many blushes: "I hope you will excuse me, my name is Adams. I do not wish to presume, but, since we go in the same direction, may I take your basket?"

She wavered. "I fear the basket might be heavy."

For answer I swung it from the counter, then stepped aside that she might precede me to the street.

And so we took our first walk together. There was no awkwardness in the situation. Her unaffected manner relieved me of all embarrassment; her conversation cleared my brain like a draught of wine. I thought her as witty as she was lovely and innocent.

After this, when we met in the street she smiled, and sometimes stopped to give me a word upon a topic of passing interest. But our friendship was not consummated until one day when the woolly dog was lost and I restored him to her arms. It was in June, and she stood at the wicket gate and wrung her hands, while her friends, the little children, clung to her in sympathy.

"Bijou! My little dog! He is lost!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Adams, have you seen him?"

I had not, but assured her that if he lived she should have him in an hour. And I made my assurance good.

Her pleasure in the wanderer's return and my share in it would have been reward enough for me had there not been a better one in store.

She folded Bijou to her breast and raised her grateful eyes to mine. "Oh, sir! is there anything—anything that I can do for you?"

I was discreet in my reply. "A young girl whom I know will be married to-night. There is a scarcity of flowers——" I began.

"Flowers!" she interrupted. "We have many, and you shall have them all! Come! Let us gather them at once," and she invited me to enter at the wicket gate.

Madame was in her garden, knee-deep in sweet peas. Mademoiselle bade me wait and ran to her; then, after a minute or two, beckoned me to approach.

"Mamma," said she, "this is Mr. Adams, the gentleman who plays upon the flute, and who has just restored my little Bijou. I have promised him some flowers!"

Madame muttered some unintelligible French and offered a lean hand in a mitten of black silk.

"Mamma is grateful to the circumstance that has given her this great pleasure. Mamma does not speak your language, though she understands it perfectly," said mademoiselle.

We gathered a basketful of flowers, mademoiselle and I, and agreed that we loved them better than anything in the world, except poetry and music—yes; and children and all the helpless creatures. Madame took no part in this; she had returned to her garden.

"*Au revoir*," said I at last; "or must it be good-bye?"

"You will send my basket at once, Mr. Brown?"

We were standing at the gate. She had suddenly grown silent, and her pretty fingers tore a rose to bits.

"May I speak to you as to a friend?" she said, and turned her eyes to mine. "Ah, sir, we are two lonely women, removed from our country and our friends! In France we were gay; here this life wearies us. For me it does not matter—I am young. But each day I watch her and I believe she pines for human fellowship. She is a Parisienne and gay by nature, though suffering and loneliness have made her sad. During many nights we have listened while you played the arias we loved upon your flute, which seemed to us like the voices of friends from over the wide sea, and often she has said to me: 'Monsieur is sympathetic and he is alone, *comme nous*.'" Then with a sudden change of manner and a shrug, "Do I offend the good taste of provincial society, or presume upon the accidental acquaintance if I ask you to come sometimes and cheer us in our exile?"

The next evening I made a careful toilette and my first call at the haunted house. It was a delightful call, and the next night but one I made another. In passing, I must admit that, as regards two things, old Peggy had reported truly. No sensible man will cavil at wine in moderation, but a cigarette between the lips of the woman he loves is a different matter altogether. One evening I made an unexpected call, and seeing, as I thought, a glow-worm in the grass, stopped to find a half-smoked cigarette. Both ladies were in the porch. Mademoiselle burst into a merry laugh.

"Monsieur is shocked!" she cried. Then more seriously, "Ah, monsieur, you in this country here are selfish, cruel. You refuse to women, who are too weak to bear the burden of life, the comforter that you will not deny yourselves. Men are more generous in France." Then she took three cigarettes from a silver case and lighted one for madame, another for me, and the third for herself.

I smoked the cigarette and shortened my call. But love does not die with such as this. In a week I was more in love than ever.

Except that mademoiselle looked pale and almost old sometimes, and sometimes madame was sad and again hilariously gay, and that their wine bill, as I learnt from their merchant, was the largest in town, the summer passed without event.

One evening in September, as I sat at my window and watched the animated shadows on the blinds across the way, a loud and sudden scream froze the blood within my heart.

I rushed downstairs and out into the street, meeting Peggy at the wicket gate.

"What is the matter, woman?" I cried, and grabbed her arm.

"Matter? Why, it's the old lady who is drunk again. And when she's drunk, sir, she's dangerous; so I came out, and wild horses won't git me back again to-night."

"Dangerous! Drunk! What do you mean?"

"You heard that scream, sir. Well she tried to blow her brains out——"

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In a moment I was through the gate and beating fiercely at the knocker. No one came, and since the front door had been left ajar, I opened it and entered the dark hall.

The parlour door stood open. Within there was a brilliant light, by which I saw madame with her face bowed in her hands, as though abandoned to despair. She was seated, and by her side, close to her heart, knelt mademoiselle, whose sobs alone disturbed the silence.

I stole away on tiptoe.

"Go back," I said to Peggy, who stood shivering at the gate. "There is no danger."

And so the mother of the girl I loved was one of the most contemptible of living creatures—a drunken woman!

I understood it all—the gloom, the wild hilarity, the young girl's paleness, and her effort to be gay while hiding from the world's cold eye. After a troubled night I resolved to tell her that I knew her secret, to warn her of her danger, and to implore her to become my wife. Since I rarely saw her for any length of time alone, it was a month before there occurred an opportunity to execute my resolution.

One afternoon I found her standing at the wicket gate. Her dress was black, and a picturesque black hat was tied under her round chin. She had a basket on her arm, and some children were clinging to her skirts, while Bijou barked and capered in anticipation of an outing.

"We go for chestnuts. Come with us!" she called to me.

It was a still October afternoon. The fields were brown, and purple mists hung on the horizon, softening the gay colouring of the distant trees. The woods were at their best—more beautiful by far than they had been in spring. Dropping chestnuts sounded pleasant to our ears; squirrels peeped at us coquettishly from their fastness in hollow trees; sunbeams sifted down upon us through the golden leaves.

Stopped to reach a maple branch above her head.

The children ran on in advance, and mademoiselle, whose arms were already full of flaming foliage, stopped to reach a maple branch above her head. Her wondrous beauty, the singular grace of her posture, and the contrast of her black gown upon the sunlit yellow background wrung from me a cry of admiration.

"Lazy fellow! Why do you not climb the chestnut tree?" she asked.

"Leave that to the children," I replied, "let me stay with you." She smiled and I hurried on impetuously: "Ah! mademoiselle, I am only a man and do not know the art of putting a plain truth so that it may not offend. Forgive me, I have thought the matter over during many wakeful nights, and believe me it is my duty to warn you of your danger."

Her face grew white, her breath came in short gasps as though exhausted by a sudden fear.

"I know your secret," I went on.

"What do you mean?" She made a mighty effort to be calm.

"I mean that you are a noble daughter, but, at the same time, ill-advised. Forgive me—I do not know how to say it—but your mother—is it well to put temptation in her way?—the wine, you know!"

She gave me one strange glance and turned away her head. She pressed her hands against her face and her shoulders shook with violent emotion. When she looked at me again her eyes were solemn and full of tears, her cheeks were crimson and bore the imprint of her fingers, and there was a twitching about the dimpled corners of her mouth that puzzled me.

She laid her hand upon her heart. "Ah! I have suffered so much, and all alone! But what is it that you wish to say to me?"

"I wish to say that there are places where the habit can be cured——"

She shook her head. "The great physicians of your country tell me that her case is hopeless. But sit down by me on this log, my friend, and I will tell you all." She paused a moment, then began:

"My father was killed at Paris and left us destitute, without a sou! She was a woman who knew only the gay life of a Parisienne; I was a child. We arrived in London, and starvation stared us in the face. However, she had learned to make embroidery, and through the kindness of some good people, was engaged to work on the trousseau of a young lady of position. Afterwards she obtained other work, but, oh! it was a cruel life for one who had lived as she had lived; and if she sought the means to make herself forget, we must give her our pity and our prayers. In a year or two my uncle died and left us his small fortune, and I have brought her to this quiet place that the world may not know our shame. That is our story." She paused and watched the children play with their fallen leaves. "Do you know why I love those children and my little dog so tenderly?" she said. "I will tell you. It is because they love and trust me though they cannot read my heart, and would love and trust me still though all the world cried out against me. Can I say as much for you, monsieur?"

"There is no need to ask."

She searched my face with her inscrutable green eyes. "Yes, I believe you are a friend."

"And since I am a friend it is my duty to advise. Will you hear me?"

"Not if you would part us; she would die away from me, and I have not the courage to fight the world alone."

"I will fight it for you. Be my wife."

The deep, mysterious look of Mona Lisa crossed her face. It seemed that in her heart she laughed at me while striving to be pitiful.

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"You are good and true, my friend," she said, "and I bless you for your kindness; but it cannot be. You have guessed one secret. I have yet another. There is some one else whom I loved during many years, and who is more to me than the salvation of my soul. Ah! would that we were dead, my love and I."

There was a long silence.

"And you have given him up for this?" cried at last.

She laid a finger on her lip. "Hush! I have told you nothing." Then she rose and called out to the children: "Come, my children, you have gathered many chestnuts, and I am lazy, and have not one. *Allons!* We will return."

"Well," thought I, when alone once more, "there is a lover after all! But he does not care for her, or he would seek her through the world, as I would in his place. And she is young; she may forget, and I have heard somewhere that the man who loves a woman stands a better chance than the man she loves when the former has the advantage of propinquity. Who knows how this may end?"

It was an evening in December and intensely cold. I sat between a candle with a shade of ruby tissue paper and a blazing fire, with a tiger skin beneath my feet; madame dozed over her knitting in a corner! Bijou stretched himself before the fire, and mademoiselle, lovelier than I had ever seen her, in a gown of olive-green embroidered heavily with threads of burnished copper, held on her knee a box of sandalwood and fitted a key into the lock.

"These are the photographs that I promised to show you," said she, as the lid flew back.

The first was of a lady in the costume of the First Empire.

"You! mademoiselle!" I cried.

"Oh, no. It is my grandmother, taken and coloured from an old pastel. You see her hair is black and mine is blonde; her cheeks are red and mine are pale; otherwise we much resemble. This is my father in his uniform. Is he not a handsome man? This is myself as an infant. Don't laugh! I was of an age when one does not compel one's self to smile upon the camera. Ah! and this is *Naman* as a bride! The face is blurred; but observe the costume! Oh! she was a beauty in her youth, and very accomplished. She made the cushion upon which you rest your arm—the flowers, as you see, are fine, like a painting. But alas! since the last few years, her eyes have been impaired. Now she can only knit stockings!"

Instantly mademoiselle was on her feet.

Suddenly Bijou raised himself and gave utterance to a series of staccato barks followed by a prolonged growl.

"*Tenez!*" cried mademoiselle. "What is that sound that I hear?"

"It is the wind," said I.

"It is the ghosts who howl and bite their thumbs at us," laughed mademoiselle. "And now, monsieur, *revenons à nos moutons!* This is the *salon* of our hotel in Paris. My father reads the *Figaro*. I rest my head against his arm, and *Maman*——"

In the hall beyond there was a sound as of stealthy steps on creaking timbers, then the door softly opened, and admitted three men in great coats.

Instantly mademoiselle was on her feet; her face was grey like ashes, her lips were blue, she shook in every limb, and yet her voice was calm and even cordial as she said:

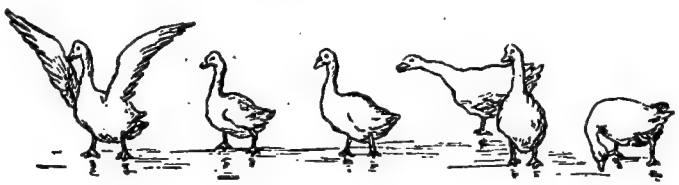
"Gentlemen, to what circumstance do we owe the honour of this visit?"

The spokesman, a powerful man, bowed low. "Madame la Comtesse de la Tour," said he. Then with the quickness of thought he crossed the room, and, with the grip of a vice, he brought down his hand on the shoulder of madame. "Comte Jean Phillipe de la Tour, I arrest you in the name of the Republic of France for the murder of Baron François de l'Hautemonde in Paris one year ago!"

* * * * *

For those who are interested in the story of the crime that shook all Paris to its centre, now about fifteen years ago, there are the papers of the time with harrowing particulars, published on the death of the Comte de la Tour in the Palace de la Revolution, and the suicide of the Comtesse, formerly the talented Mademoiselle Victorine, of the Théâtre Français. For me, the old love lives yet, and two new ghosts have come to burn their midnight lamps and show their haggard faces at the latticed windows of the haunted house across the way.

MABEL MILLER.



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The Simpleton had made a break of fifty-two, and he turned round on his father with the do-that-every-time air of a man whose lush conceit takes the form of unctuous modesty.

"There is at least one thing you can do," said the old man, taking up his cue and chuckling a little to himself. "I am glad to have found it out."

"Any fool can play billiards," returned the Simpleton complacently—his father could not.

"It is a pity—a genuine pity, that you do not appreciate me more," he added, a little injured by the reflection on his intellectual faculties. "You miss the fundamental principle of my system."

"Your what?" queried the old man with something like concern.

"My system," repeated the Simpleton unabashed. "Go at everything backwards and you avoid any possible smacks in the eye—that's my theory," and he emphasised it by retreating a step on to the edge of the door as the footman entered with the coffee.

"Besides," he resumed, as soon as his voice could be heard above the clatter of breaking crockery, "to come down to first principles I am not self made. The law of heredity has been my curse. Whatever partial failure has attended my life is due to you. It is a severe handicap having a father and mother at all. The one thing which a man would thank his parents for they cannot transmit—experience."

The old man snorted.

"Were a child born with the accumulated experience of his ancestors," he observed, "that child would be insane before the end of its first year. Such an acquaintance with the world, the flesh, and the devil, would make his life sad, miserable, utterly joyless and desolate. The illusions of youth are life's ideal; disillusion makes no one happier or better. Indeed," added the old man, "contentment is a state of ignorance, not a state of knowledge."

"On second thoughts, I am inclined to agree with you," responded the Simpleton magnanimously. "All that old age and learning do for a man is to reveal the fact that he knows nothing. On second thoughts, too, there is something better even than experience that *may* be transmitted from father to son—money." The Simpleton was too polite to do more than emphasise the "may." But the expression was eloquent.

The scene was the billiard-room of Elthorne Manor. The old man was Sir Hamilton Aston-Superfield, and the Simpleton his son and heir.

Now Hamilton the second, known in familiar parlance as Tony, had not been, and was never likely to be, a success. His disgraceful career at school had culminated in expulsion, for having committed every crime in the calendar of youth. His first term at Oxford had added little to his own credit, and a good deal to that of the University tradesmen. It was this matter which now came up for discussion.

"I am very sorry," observed Sir Hamilton, "but these bills of yours are no affair of mine. You have seen fit to be extravagant, and now you must have lessons in economy. If there is one thing I can never forgive, one fault I can never overlook, it is running into debt."

The Simpleton looked unconcerned.

"It was you who drove me to it," he remarked, poising a liqueur-glass on his fingers. "If you send your son to the 'Varsity, you ought to see that his means are sufficient."

"Your allowance was extremely liberal," replied Sir Hamilton, "*extremely* liberal. When I was at Oxford, my father gave me a cheque for exactly half the amount you have found so insufficient, and I remember well how he told me he did not expect me to spend it all. But I somehow managed to keep out of debt. In fact, I made a point of paying for everything as I bought it, and consequently I never found myself in the humiliating embarrassment from which you now expect me to extricate you. Look at the tailor's bill—upon my soul it's musty with old age. And £80 for clothes in one term, too. Extravagance is a tendency which you will do very well to check, because there may come a time when we shall not be so well off as we are now."

"The end of the world has been prophesied," observed the Simpleton quite unperturbed. Then he extended his hand, and said very quietly: "May I look at that bill?"

"You may," said the old man.

The Simpleton examined it critically.

"I forgot to tell you about this," he observed. "Gilding thought you might settle it with the others. You notice it is drawn out to Hamilton Aston-Superfield, Esq., *but the date is* 1857; that, sir, I think is a little account of yours that still remains open on Gilding's books."

"You don't mean that," cried the old man. His face turned pink. He gasped a little, and, thinking of nothing more to say, took refuge in silence.

There was a look of triumph in the Simpleton's eyes.

"Taking them all round, I am not sure that our fathers were so much better than we are," he remarked, apparently addressing the billiard-table. "I am sure, my dear parent, in drawing a cheque for this little account, you will also settle mine." And before the old

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man could think of anything to say, the Simpleton had risen nonchalantly and gone off to bed.

* * * * *

It was the day before Tony returned to Oxford. Nothing more had been heard about the bills, but the question of his allowance naturally had to be broached.

"I am sorry," the old man said, "but the last year has been financially a bad one. I cannot afford you even the same allowance as you had last term. You must do as well as you can, and pray Heaven for better times."

The Simpleton sniggered. He looked at his father standing with his back to the fire, his coat-tails under his arms, and came to the conclusion that these bad times were a myth.

Owing to extreme youth, the Simpleton did not think himself half the fool that he was. Elated by the success of the little conspiracy which he and his tailor had concocted, he thought more of himself than ever.

"My worthy parent cannot deceive me like that," he confided to the ear of his confidential friend, as they sat together one evening in his rooms overlooking the "Broad." "The only question is, how am I to have my revenge? His niggardly spirit must be broken."

The confidential friend considered.

"Is your governor proud?" he queried.

"As proud as he is rich," replied the Simpleton. "What's your idea?"

"This," said his confidential friend. "Do as you have done before, only more so. Run up bills until they reach the length of a national petition to Parliament, or the manuscript of a country parson's sermon."

"What for?" said the Simpleton dully. "The old man would not pay them, and I should be ruined."

"He might *say* that he wouldn't," retorted the confidential friend, "but when it came to the point he would. A proud man will do anything to save his family name from disgrace. You know that yourself."

The Simpleton assented.

"I think," he observed, "that debts of honour would carry more weight than tradesmen's bills. But I like your idea, chummie."

And he set to work. Now, Oxford is not a difficult place in which to spend money—and there came a time when the Simpleton pulled up short, terrified by the extent of his liabilities.

"Double them," was the laconic advice of his confidential friend. "It is no good doing the thing at all unless you make a job of it. Besides, 'In for a penny, in for a pound,' you know. If there is going to be any hitch you may as well be a bankrupt for £2,000 as for £1,000."

"My dear fellow," said the Simpleton, in a sepulchral voice, "I owe nearly £5,000 already."

The confidential friend drew a long whistle of admiration.

"The dickins you do," he said. "Make it £10,000." One can afford to be reckless in advice.

The Simpleton began to regret that he had ever taken any from his friend. But it was too late to go back; too late for regret or remorse. After all, what was £10,000—or £20,000 for the matter of that—to his father. It was nonsense for him to talk about bad times. He was a mean miser, and this should be a lesson.

So the Simpleton argued. By the time that the end of the term approached, his indebtedness amounted exactly to £7,200.

"Capital," said his confidential friend.

The morning for going home arrived. The Simpleton felt exultant. It was certainly a triumph. He pictured his father's face of horror; and the more he thought of the *dénoûment*, the greater his exhilaration. There was a letter waiting for him on his breakfast-table. It was from the family solicitor, and ran thus:

Pump Handle Court.

Dear Sir,—It is our sad and painful duty to acquaint you of the fact that your respected father passed peacefully away yesterday at two o'clock. The doctors, we believe, attribute the cause of this sudden death to heart disease. We did not see that we should gain anything by wiring you. We trust you will allow us to express our sincerest sympathy in your bereavement. It is also our unfortunate duty to inform you that while Elthorne Manor is mortgaged up to £50,000, your beloved father's personality amounts to only £8,000. It will be necessary, therefore, that the house and estates are handed over to the mortgagees, which will leave you £8,000 in ready money. We happen to know of an admirable investment should you feel inclined to put this capital in some reliable business. You will have, of course, to pay your educational expenses at Oxford; and as we understand that you have overdrawn your allowance at the local bankers, it would be best, perhaps, if you would send them a cheque for the amount before we come to any decision about further investments.

We beg once more to express our sympathy with you, dear sir, and to remain, your humble servants, Jeremiah, Jones, and Jacob.

It was a very pale-faced, wreckish-looking individual who sat all that morning in the room overlooking the "Broad," with a pencil in his hand, and the table strewn with paper.

It came out in this manner, and the confidential friend himself said it was sad.

Legacy		£8,000
Amount due to University ...	£200	
Overdrawn at the Bank... ...	£500	
Thrown away	£7,200	
		£7,900
Balance		£100

"It is not every man who has the pleasure of paying for his own education in classics and mathematics," the Simpleton observed, with something very much like a sob, "but when it comes to paying for his youthful indiscretions"——He broke off so overcome that he could not finish the sentence.

"I tell you what it is," he went on with melancholy philosophy, "the wisest men in the world are fools who do not think themselves smart."

"Or those who only give advice," said the confidential friend.

W. A. W.

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Pink Blossoms.

War is always sacrifice—never mercy. War demands death and wounds and destruction. He who can kill and wound and destroy most is the greatest hero. War respects nothing, venerates nothing, blackens everything. It moves in trails across a country as a venomous serpent winds through the grass. You follow the trails, and look in vain for one single spot where mercy and pity stayed the hand of destruction. Blackness, desolation, death, and new-made graves are the milestones on the trails of war.

It was a May day, with the peach trees everywhere in blossom. Behind us were the smoke and flame of destruction; ahead the old farmhouses, which sheltered no one who could march in the ranks and fight against us. The fragrant blossoms, the green hills, the sunny skies—everything told of peace, and yet war was at hand as the flaxen-haired children came running to the doors.

Just below a farmhouse we halt to water our thirsty horses at a brook flowing lazily across the road. A few men ride on to the house. We can hear children crying in affright. We can hear the voice of a woman raised in tearful protestation. We can see an old grey-haired man with a child in his arms at the door, and though his voice is too weak to reach us, we can see by his gestures that he resents the lawless invasion of the premises.

Some of us ride to the right to reach the banks, where the waggons are already drawn up; some to the left, where the horses are at pasture; the remainder straight on up the road. Suddenly the bugles sound the alarm, and then warn us to rally on the centre. In one minute the scene is changed from dreamy peace to active war. A body of the enemy, having the same object in view as ourselves, has come up from the south and attacked us at sight. Many a saddle on our side is emptied before we check their fierce charge, and push them back till once more we have room to form.

Each side has a light battery. The guns get to work almost as soon as the carbine. The old farmhouse is the key of the battlefield.

An old man and a mother and four children are in there, but what of it? This is war. No one gives them a thought. Shot and shell plough through the ancient structure—bullets search out every nook and corner.

Now our right wing drives the enemy back with a cheer—now the enemy presses back our left and shouts in exultation. It is a hot fight for thirty minutes—time enough for the dead and wounded to number 150. The reverberation of the guns brings down a shower of blossoms at every discharge, and the black powder smoke floats up through the branches, and smirches and discolours and leaves its grime.

"Rally on the centre! Forward—trot—gallop—charge!"

We have broke the enemy and sent them flying. We follow them for a mile or more, shooting and hacking, and then the bugles blow the recall, and we cease the pursuit. There are dead men on the dusty highway, in the ditches, among the May weeds and the thistles, and dead horses almost block the way at certain points. Yes, a hot little fight, and we are proud of our victory as we return to the old farmhouse.

We have our dead to bury, and our wounded to look after, and it is only when an officer starts to enter the house to say that it must be turned into a shambles that the inmates are remembered. The officer cries out and starts back in horror. Under the peach tree growing close to the back door lies the body of the grey-haired man—father and grandfather to the woman and children respectively.

He must have been in flight when struck by a solid shot, which cut him almost in two at the hips. He was carrying a child not more than two years old hugged to his breast. Her little arms were round his neck, and her face was hidden in his bosom. We unclasped the old man's arms and took her up. She was dead—dead without a wound. She had died of terror as he sank down with her, perhaps kissing her in his last breath.

As we stood with uncovered heads the woman came out. Great Heavens! but how white her face—how ghastly the colour of her lips—how red the blood which dripped from her wounded shoulder on the pink blossoms at her feet! She looked at her father and gasped for breath. She looked at her youngest born, and her throat swelled up, and her eyes dilated until her look frightened me.

"Dead, both dead?" she asked in a whisper.

"Poor woman!" replied the officer as we turned our heads away.

"Go in," she hissed, pointing to the door; "go in and gaze upon the rest of your work."

There they lay—the other three children—all killed and mangled by the same shell as it exploded in the kitchen. Flaxen hair and chubby hands and little blue sun-bonnets contrast strangely with the red blood of war. We tiptoed out, and stood beside the mother, who had prostrated herself on the bodies of those so dear to her. She could not weep and wail. She could only moan and croon to them in the agony of her breaking heart.

"Poor woman, poor woman!" sighed one.

She rose up slowly, looked from face to face as if to picture it on her memory, and said:

"Leave me! May the God of Heaven take vengeance upon you to the uttermost!"

And we called it a hot little fight, and we felt proud of a victory won over a superior force, and we—well, each and every trooper prayed Heaven to be merciful and pitiful to that poor woman, and over the graves of her dear ones a hundred rough and blood-stained hands scattered peach-tree blossoms in atonement. We could do no more. War was impatient and angered even as we did that.

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THE QUEEN OF THE ARENA

BOY and man, the two were closely observed by several of the tent men, who were holding hard on a rope, awaiting the low-spoken order from the "guv'nor" to "let go."

"The old man is thinking about his Liddy, I guess," said the foremost one, Jerry Roper, the "mouth-man" of the whole gang.

The remark was overheard by the "old man." He unfolded his arms, lifted the brim of his hat so that the nearest torch shot its sallow yellow light into his eyes, brightening up a worried, unpleasant countenance.

"And sorry was the day for all of us," he said, "when my lady, the Queen of the Arena, left us for good and all."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Jerry. "A man's wife is the best friend he can have in the world, and when she's gone, good-bye to all that is worth living for."

The "old man" sighed and shook his head in sympathy with the remark.

He was an "old man" and "old Griff" thus interchangeably called by his men—only in a figurative sense, for his age was but little past thirty. A man ages fast in experience, conducting such a show as his, and travelling as it was through the rough mining districts of California. On heavily displayed bills that were posted on the sides of tents and shanties, and on some of the larger trees, he was, besides, "the most renowned bareback rider that the world has ever seen."

Presently he said:

"Somethin's got to be done—somethin's got to be done right off. I'd like to know what kind of a show that is in these days that has no woman in it. We hain't made money enough in the past week," he growled in conclusion, "to buy horsefeed, let alone settling up the salary list."

This was something of an exaggeration, but fitted in well with "old Griff's" moody condition, and he again pulled his hat over his eyes, shrugging his shoulders as he did so.

Jerry Roper had had something of an idea, too; and he lounged with it towards the centre pole.

"I say, Griff," he said, "I've got an idea."

"What about?"

"Why, this 'ere woman business."

"Let me have it."

"Do you remember a week ago yesterday, early in the morning, when we were just making Lazy Man's Gulch?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Right at the end of the cañon we saw a man, a horse, and a boy."

"Yes. The man and horse were dead, and the boy not far from it. What of it?"

"Didn't you have the man decently buried, feed the boy, and tell him to gather up his traps, stow them in some waggon, and come along with us until he could find something better?"

"Anyone would a-done the same," grumbled "old Griff." "But you're a long time coming to that idea of yours

"Do you know who that man was?"

"No."

"Well, I've talked with the boy. He's took quite a fancy to me, and he says as how his father was a sort of a showman in the juggling way. He was pretty old, and badly down at the heel. So when his old horse gave out he gave out too, and they laid down there and died together."

"Old Griff" stopped Jerry abruptly, by touching him gently on the breast with his forefinger, and said solemnly: "That's just what I was thinking about myself." And Jerry added, as though there had not been the least break in his remarks: "The boy is supple and graceful, learns easily, and in a week has picked up a good many tricks of the ring."

All this time Griff had never once taken his eyes off the slender lad who was still seated beside him. Griff walked over towards him.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Don't know," replied the lad. "About sixteen or seventeen, I should think."

"Did you ever ride a horse?" pursued Griff.

The boy's bright face lighted up, and he repeated, slowly:

"Did—I—ever—ride

"Did you ever ride a horse!" pursued Griff.

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—a—horse?" He smiled serenely. "I—should—just—think—so."

"Do you like horses?"

The lad's only reply was a partial whistle.

"As soon as the tent is up to-morrow morning," said Griff, "you come to me wherever you can find me." Then he walked away again, repeating his words: "Somethin's got to be done, and done at once, and I'd like to know why not."

Thirty miles away from there, by nine o'clock next morning the tent was up, with all its flags flying, and the busy side-show people screaming their attractions to the early comers. Griff was in the ring, and the boy was with him. By the light of day the lad was seen to be a slender youth, straight-limbed and erect, head nicely poised on his shoulders; a fair, fresh complexion, and light hair, but with eyes so dark a brown that they seemed, in contrast with the flesh, to be dead black. Over a flannel shirt he wore an old blue blouse, fitting his form loosely, and brown trousers that must have been made originally for his father; and blouse, trousers, patched low shoes, and ragged slouch hat, were all of ancient pedigree.

Griff looked the boy all over, and his eyes and face showed that his scrutiny had satisfied him. He had given some previous directions, for as they stood there, one of the attendants led into the ring a horse having on his back a well-worn "pad."

"There she is," the attendant said.

The lad looked up at him quickly.

"Do you think you could stand on that pad while the horse walked round the ring?" Griff asked.

"Try me and see," was the reply.

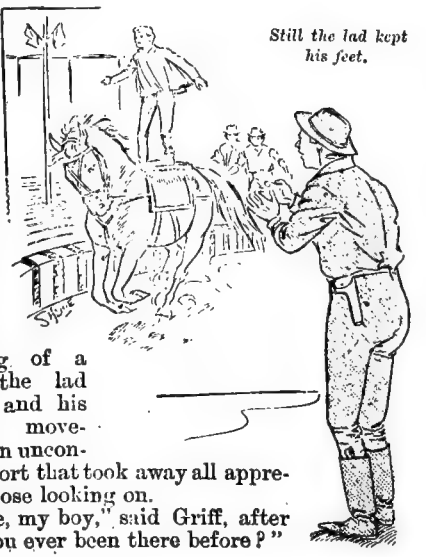
"Well—get on."

The lad sat down in the ring and pulled off his shoes, leaving his feet bare. Then he tossed his ragged cap towards the centre pole, and with a short run and spring he was astride the horse.

"Lead him slowly round," said Griff to the attendant, and then as his order was obeyed, he added: "Let's see what you can do." This latter to the lad.

He was on his feet instantly, and his various movements were as free and unconstrained as though he had been on a level floor.

"Let him go faster," he said to the attendant, and Griff nodded.



Still the lad kept his feet.

The horse, an old and safe hand at the business, with a touch sprang into one of those long, slow, regular strides, whose rise and fall can be timed by the ticking of a clock. Still the lad kept his feet, and his lithe, graceful movements showed an unconsciousness of effort that took away all apprehension from those looking on.

"Look a-here, my boy," said Griff, after a time, "have you ever been there before?"

"Never," replied the lad.

"Well, that settles it, then," said Griff.

The boy looked at him curiously, but nothing more was said.

Simms, advance agent of the show, was recalled. He and Griff had a long conference one morning, and off he went again. For two weeks every morning for an hour, and every afternoon for two hours, the boy was in the ring, with Griff looking on. No one knew exactly what it meant, and no one suspected, excepting Jerry Roper.

One morning Griff called the lad into the dressing-tent, and they went to a great chest in the corner. Griff knelt down and unlocked it. Lifting the cover, he displayed a quantity of dresses, brilliant-coloured ribbons, gilt and spangles. The lad standing by thought he saw tears in his eyes, and felt certain that he sighed.

"This hasn't been opened for more'n six months since she died," said Griff, half soliloquising, as he touched very gently the soft fabrics that were exposed to view. "But somethin's got to be done," he added, as though bracing himself with the thought—"somethin's got to be done at once. Why not?"

The lad looked at him with curiosity.

Griff raised his head.

"Look here," he said. "You see our show. It's a good one as far as it goes, but it don't go far enough. It used to be perfect when she was with us. She could draw. She was as pretty and sweet as a rose, and she'd fill our tent three times a day. Our business has dropped off to almost nothin'—that is, nothin' beyond expenses—and somethin's got to be done. I wouldn't let no other woman wear her clothes, but I'd let you, for I think you'll be a credit to 'em. We can fix you up so's no one could tell that you wasn't as pretty a girl as ever danced a sailor's hornpipe. Some red on your cheeks and lips, a little black on your eyebrows and eyelashes, and a nice blonde wig, and there you are. You can help us out, and make a nice pile for yourself too."

The boy stood still with his eyes cast rather disdainfully upon the finery on the ground. His attitude, with his hands crossed in front of him, was that of decided unwillingness.

"Come now," continued Griff, "where would you a' been except for me? I don't want to preach up my own deeds, but I helped you out of a pinch. Turn about, my boy, and help me out of a pinch."

The boy was evidently touched by this appeal, and by Griff's serious manner.

"If I do, I'll have to wear these things all of the time," objected the boy, touching the skirts disdainfully. "Then it's cheating, and if they ever find out—phew!"—ending with a low-drawn whistle.

"They? Who?" asked Griff.

"Why, these wild men of the mines. They'd tear your tent all to pieces to find themselves sold."

"Never you mind about that," said Griff. "I'll take care of them, and you would not have to wear a dress exceptin' durin' your acts."

"Well, give me the things, and I'll see how they look," said the boy rather petulantly. He grasped a quantity in his hands, and moved towards an inner dressing-room.

A week after that, as in the early morning the great "London Sensation," under Alonzo Griffin, drove into the neighbourhood of a great mining camp, there were some new and very red and blue bills to be seen, announcing the first appearance in this country, and secured at an enormous outlay, of Annetta Belora, the

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Bavarian Equestrienne. All down the bills were frequent reference to her, sometimes with great alliterative attractiveness as the "Bavarian Beauty" or the "Beautiful Bavarian," or, again, as being as sparkling and lively and bewitching as the beer of her native country.

As Jerry Roper said that evening:

"He took those fellows clean off their feet, and it's business again. I never saw this tent packed as it was this afternoon and evening, and Griff says he's already received seven offers of marriage and five chances at a share in a successful silver mine." Then Jerry very quietly chuckled as he thought of the solid basis on which the salary list was suddenly placed.

Whether or not it was true that the lad had taken all the men of that comparatively womanless town off their feet, he had at least had a powerful effect on one young fellow. This one had drifted in with the throng in the afternoon, and had been a rather listless spectator until the appearance of the "Bavarian." He was attracted at first, and then completely captivated. He returned in the evening, and in lieu of the bouquets and other flowers that are showered on favourites in the East, he flung at the lad, as he passed from the ring to the dressing-tent, a small bag of gold dust. "Annetta" picked it up, and gave a grateful glance at the donor that put the finishing touch upon his infatuation.

"I say. I want to speak to you."

The young fellow, as powerful as Hercules, crushed his way through the throng at the conclusion of the entertainment and ran round to the dressing-tent. He pushed his way past the helpers and horses until he approached the corner where the lad stood, wrapped in so large a blanket that he was entirely hidden except his face and curly blonde wig. The stranger brusquely cried out:

"I say. I want to speak to you."

"Out with it," replied the lad.

"I had a little sister once, who, if she had grown up to be a girl, would have looked, I think, just as you look. What's your name?"

Old Griff came up at this.

"The sister dodge is played out here," he said.

Annetta laugh a chirrupy laugh, and disappeared as directed.

Griff gave a little whistle, and wherever he came from, there suddenly appeared between the young stranger and the curtained corner an immense man with a particularly brutal countenance, and muscles so big you could almost see them working beneath his garments as he moved. He was one of the canvas men, and rejoiced in the name of "Rocky the Rough."

"Better go back, young fellow," said Rocky. "You ain't wanted here."

"I believe you've stolen my sister," said the young man. "I'm going to see her, and get from her own mouth something about herself."

"Oh are yer?" said Rocky.

"Get out of the way," cried the stranger, and he made a move to push past his opponent; but it was only a move, for he felt himself, in spite of his own strength, which was by no means small, lifted from the ground, and carried outside the tent.

"Stay outside," said Rocky, as he placed the young stranger firmly on his feet. "I don't think it will be healthy for you to try to come inside again. Your sister? Ho, ho!" Then he disappeared inside.

The young man was greatly put out in more senses than one, and stood just a minute thinking what he should do next. No one could have entertained for a moment any doubt of his honesty of purpose and earnestness if he could have seen the expression of his face.

He felt a slight touch on his elbow, and, turning by the dim light of the stars, saw a lad standing close beside him.

"I say," said the boy, looking up with an eager expression in his eyes, "what is the sister racket that you have been a-givin' of us?"

The young man looked curiously down at the slender figure at his side, whose words were so unlike the tone used or the earnestness of the attitude unconsciously chosen.

"If you'd tell me," continued the boy, "perhaps I might help you. I know 'em all well in there. And if I couldn't, perhaps I could tell you somethin' that'd make you holler."

There was a sober earnestness about the boy that attracted the young man to him strangely.

"Well, there ain't any but little, anyhow," he said, "and it won't take long; but if you don't do as you say you will, I'll break every bone in your body. D'ye hear?"

"Yes; gallop along; my bones are all safe enough."

"My mother," began the young man, "was one of the best ring performers in the whole profession. She was the first woman in the world that ever did a bareback act, and my father was one of those old-fashioned clowns, who told stories in the ring and flung stale jokes at the audience when nothing else was going on. When I was about twelve years old my mother was kicked by a vicious horse, and so badly hurt that after lingering a few weeks in great agony, she died. We were three left—father, myself, and a little sister only about four years of age at that time. Misfortunes heaped upon us then. Father lost his voice, became rheumatic, and wasn't fit for the ring or any show. I was a stout lad of fourteen or fifteen, and put out into the world for myself. I travelled three or four seasons with a show, but I didn't like it, and it didn't like me. So I came out here, and here I've been, sometimes in luck, sometimes dead down on it, ever since, with the exception of one winter, when I thought it was about time for me to hunt up my relations and went east to do it. None of us were much in the letter way, and we hadn't heard of each other during the twelve or fourteen years of our separation but once or twice. I might as well have stayed here, for I didn't find hind or hair of them. Even their names were forgotten, except by some of the 'old timers' who recalled the daring horsemanship of my mother. That's all, my boy," concluded the young man. "Now bring me to Annetta."

"What has Annetta got to do with it all?"

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"Do?" said the young man eagerly. "Everything. She was the image of my mother as she rode to-day. It was for all the world to me as though I was a little boy again, and sat looking with a child's delight at the picture she made in her ribbons, laces, and spangles, flying round the ring."

"What's your name?" asked the lad.

"What's that got to do with it?" angrily replied the young man, clutching his arm. "Bring me to the girl, as you said you would, or I'll crush you into a thousand pieces!"

The boy uttered a cry of pain, and followed it up with the exclamation:

"Don't! don't! I'm Annetta myself."

"You!" The young man looked at him in the shadow with a fierce scowl. "Why, you little liar!" he continued. "I ought to have known that you were putting up some showman's job on me. If you were bigger I'd pummel you into a jelly!" and he flung him to one side.

Luckily the place where the boy struck was on the canvas, and between two of the tent poles, or he might have been seriously injured by the shock.

"I'm not a liar," he said. "Look here!" and he took from his pocket the bag of gold dust that the young man had flung at him after his act. The young man seized him again and dragged him towards the light that glimmered through a chink in the dressing-tent. He took his head roughly in both hands, holding the face so that the light fell full upon it.

"Don't! don't! I'm Annetta myself."

An eager and intent expression came into the young man's eyes as he looked, and the lad trembled in the rough grasp. The paint was not entirely washed from the face and eyes, and there was enough there to show that the lad had told the truth. The scrutiny was kept up until the boy fairly writhed in the grasp with which he was held, and then the young man, loosening his hold and exclaiming: "Well, I'm blessed!" went wrathfully away, disappearing in the darkness.

The lad had dropped upon the ground, and alternately rubbing his arm and his head, was crying bitterly.

"Why didn't he tell me his real name," he muttered to himself. "He ain't got no sister—leastways he don't deserve to have none, to treat a poor little fellow like me so. He'll be sorry for it some day."

The tent was suffocatingly full at each of the three performances on the next day. Old Griff was very happy, and Jerry Roper made frequent allusions to the salary list. At night it seemed as though the throng was so large that it made the canvas bulge out all round, and if any more had made an effort to come in it would have split the tent from centre pole to entrance-door. The crowd was not an orderly one. It was boisterous and unruly, and had duly provided itself with deep potations to keep its feelings up to the proper height.

Few women were present, and most of the men were without coats, some without hats, and many with their brawny chests bare. It was the last night of the show at that camp, and there seemed to be a determination, perhaps a predetermination from the first, to make trouble and guy the whole performance.

Old Griff thought the final act in the ring, when the lad made his appearance, would settle the whole difficulty, and hurried along the several numbers on his programme in order to reach it.

The increasing clamour and tumult should have shown him how mistaken he was. It seemed as though the crowd was working itself up to a climax, and reached it when the master in the ring announced the coming of the "most wonderful, and at the same time the most beautiful lady equestrian in the world."

The lad appeared from the dressing-tent, looking, indeed, in his make-up, and by the glare of the central ring of blazing lights, very pretty. He was greeted with a shout whose character, whether of derision or delight, it would have been difficult to tell, it was so tumultuous. He tripped lightly over the sawdust, and sprang easily upon the spirited horse.

They went twice round the ring amid comparative quiet; but it was only as though the crowd had stopped for a moment to take breath, or like a wild animal hesitating just before it springs upon its expected victim.

In the midst of this quiet a rough voice cried out from the throng:

"That's him! We're fooled! It's only a boy dressed up as a girl!" Then came shouts from all directions: "Out with him! Down with the tent! Away with the fraud!"

For an instant old Griff was dismayed at the situation of affairs, coming in such an unexpected way to him. He was never before placed in quite such a close corner. Thoughts flew through his head like lightning, suggesting ways out of the difficulty that surrounded him. The very thing that he thought would restore quiet, order, and good feeling, was the very thing towards which the tumult had been making up its way.

The frightened horse on which the equally alarmed lad rode did not get three times round the ring. A tall man, lying flat on his face on the ground, not twenty feet away from him, laid the long muzzle of a pistol on the top of the earthen ring. There was a report, a wreath of smoke, and the handsomest and most valuable horse in old Griff's whole stud, with a bullet that entered his body just behind the near foreleg, fell dead.

The lad luckily sprang nimbly to his feet and looked round for some way out of the ring. The shot stirred up the final drop in the animosity and venom of the drunken mob. The boy saw, in the instant that he looked, surrounding him an angry circle, glance whichever way he would, of fierce ugly-faced wild men, bent on mischief. He shrank away towards the centre pole in an agony of fear, covered his face with his hands, sank upon the ground and burst into tears.

He was not alone, however. Old Griff called to "Rocky the Rough" and his three or four other helpers, and the half dozen or so men were able to spring into the ring and gather about the centre pole before the throng could stumble over the low embankment and have it all to themselves.

"Look out for the boy!" old Griff shouted to his men.

The screaming, frenzied mob surged in upon the half dozen men within the ring. The contest was too close for the use of the ever-present and ever-ready pistol, and it was at first a question of muscle and strength. "Rocky the Rough" swung his huge form, arms, and fists in every direction, and where the latter stopped a man was

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sure to drop. Three or four pistol shots were heard outside, and then someone called out: "They've cut the stay ropes of the centre pole."

That this was true, the tall spar itself instantly began to show. It swayed this way and that. but was held for a time by the canvas and the ropes of the side walls.

Old Griff stood just in front of the lad, and there the pushing, struggling and fighting seemed to be the fiercest, as though the crowd was most eager to wreak its vengeance on him who had himself acted the deception. With a surge and a swing from the rear that could not be resisted, old Griff was thrown on one side, and the foremost in the throng had his hand on the boy. He tore the curly blonde wig from his head and, holding it in the air, called the attention of the mob to it, who replied with yells of satisfaction.

Then he was struck squarely between the eyes.

He tossed it among them, and it was torn to pieces. Then he forced the shrinking boy upon his feet. He, with clasped hands, begged for mercy, where there was none. Griff tore the thin gauze skirts from the trembling form, and tossed them piecemeal over at the crowd. These, too, were torn in shreds by eager hands. He seized the lace, ribbons, and spangles at the neck, and, with one wrench, tore them away down to the waist.

There was a sudden hush in the tumult.

He who still held the torn pieces of gauze in his hands stood a moment as if petrified, then he was struck squarely between the eyes, and dropped like a piece of lead to the ground. The young stranger who had sought to see Annetta the evening before had delivered the blow, and seized the lad in his arms.

There was a single unanimity of expression amongst those standing the nearest as they looked. Old Griff started it.

"Good gracious! Can it be?" he cried.

"Rocky the Rough," looking round, echoed the cry. A third took it up, and, finding it too deep for any other word, could only add:

"Well—well—well—well!"

Then Jerry Roper came in with a good fourth, adding to make sure his position——

"He's a woman after all!"

The young stranger holding the trembling form close to his own, and looking down into the painted, but so much the more haggard face, asked:

"Then you *are* Frank Crohger?"

"And—you—Robert?"

He nodded, but she could not see him, for she had fainted.

With the wayward and quick changing moods of a mob, the fact that they had been warring upon a woman, and that the mistake was all their own, almost instantly becoming known to them, their animosity changed to a friendliness that was almost as rough as had been their anger in its manifestations. They hunted up the man who had shot the horse, and forced him to "settle" to an amount three or four times the value of the animal. They decided, late as it was, that the performance must all be gone through with again; that the tent must be cleared, and everybody must pay for admission. Woe be to that person, too, who showed the least inclination to criticise or to object to anything. He should die. And they meant it.

The tent was cleared, and the ring again prepared for work. The ticket seller took his place in the waggon, and his only difficulty was in handing out the bits of pasteboard fast enough. No one stopped for any change or asked for it, and old Griff said, when he came to settle up next morning, that one more such benefit would have made him the richest man in the profession anywhere.

Playing to such an audience, the whole company fairly outdid themselves, and for the "Beautiful Bavarian" there was a tremendous ovation. When she did finally retire, threatened with a returning unconsciousness, from which she had not fairly recovered when she made her appearance, she could call herself a very well-to-do girl from the favours cast upon her by the generous crowd.

"Why didn't you tell me who you were last night?" asked her brother after the performance was over.

"I would have done so if you had let me," was the reply; "but you were so awfully rough and hasty with me. Besides, I remembered the last words father ever spoke to me. 'Be a boy, Frank,' he said, 'as long as you can. Boys get along better'n girls. You have been such to me for more'n fifteen years now. And don't give yourself away to anybody—anybody, d'ye hear?—unless you're cock sure you've got 'em dead to rights.'"

"She played it pretty fine on all of us, didn't she?" struck in Jerry Roper, "but I suspected her, after all!"

Robert tried to persuade his sister to remain with him, but old Griff seemed to have obtained a stronger influence over her than he could exert, and the next day she travelled on with the show, her and its reputation made by an incident that was made the most of.

During the year Robert had intimations now and then from her how it would all end, and the next season, when the show made its annual visit to the camp, she was, as Jerry Roper explained it: "No longer Frank Crohger, nor even Annetta Belora, except on the bills, but Mrs. Alonzo Griffin, as sprightly as a new india-rubber ball, as pretty as her mother, as prosperous and fortunate as a diamond king, and as happy as a good husband, plenty of money, and immense popularity with the public could make her." J. P. L.

Next Week

"The Queen of Night," a thrilling story by Headon Hill, author of "Guilty Gold," etc., etc., will commence in *Short Stories*, illustrated profusely each week by Raymond Potter.

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"We find him guilty," announced the jury, and he accepted the verdict with the air of a man in a dream—and a very unpleasant one at that.

"'Tis very queer," exclaimed all his friends, with more or less sympathy, according to their capacity. "Who would have thought him such a brute?"

"He is innocent," cried those who loved him, and so he was. But he is still in prison. Never mind what his name is. We will call him the Innocent Guilty.

When he was innocent only, and some year and a half before he was guilty, he made the mistake of loving the Wrong Girl. This he promptly followed up by another—that of tiring of her. She was the Wrong Girl for him to tire of, also, and I have often thought how much better it would have been for him to have stuck to his first mistake. But he thought he could not.

A woman would have pretended to do so, but being a man he was more honest in his badness. And he thought it was a fine, bold, manly thing to explain to the Wrong Girl just how he felt about it. He told her that he had made a mistake, and that it would be a terrible thing, not to say a wicked thing, for a man to marry a woman he no longer loved.

It almost seemed as if she agreed with him, she was so still. They had just returned from the theatre, and she said nothing until she had carefully removed the hat-pins from her little round toque. She looked in the glass as she did so, and her face grew very grey. He could see her reflection from where he stood, and it seemed almost as if the words came from that grey face in the glass when she finally muttered:

"You shall never marry *her!*"

This startled him extremely, as he found it hard to imagine where she had heard of the Right Girl. For there was a Right Girl, or one whom he now considered to be right. But the Wrong Girl had never heard of the Right Girl, and it was merely a guess—a very natural one. But the poor Innocent Guilty stood first on one foot and then on the other, and felt very sad, and very sorry for her, especially so as he congratulated himself that she was taking it so quietly.

This was where he made his third mistake. If he had looked less at the childish, wide open eyes, and more at the close shut lips and strongly curved chin, he might still have been disporting himself in this very pleasant outer world.

"I—I—thought I loved you," said the Innocent Guilty; "but—it—was all a mistake—and—it is over now."

In this the Innocent Guilty was again mistaken.

But the Wrong Girl only stared thoughtfully at the pretty red flowers in the shabby carpet of the little room.

"And so—this is the end?" she asked finally, after carefully wetting her dainty lips with her kitten-like tongue.

"It is better so," he answered softly and quite tenderly. She seemed so young and so helpless in her sorrow. But what could he do? You cannot force love to stay at the first hotel he comes to. So they both stood there looking at each other in an odd, still way.

"Kiss me, then," said she, and almost smiled. He was much relieved. What he had dreaded was over. But it occurred to him that it would be well to wait until out of doors before allowing his set face to relax. He turned to leave the room.

Her lips had not trembled when he kissed her, and her hand was just as steady. Suddenly there was a sharp, stinging report, and the cheap paper of the walls flashed under a pale blue glare. At first the Innocent Guilty feared he was shot. Since then he has wished that he had been.

Then he turned, and there in a little soft huddled heap lay the Wrong Girl on the floor, close beside a small toilet-table draped with faded chintz. Its upper drawer was open, and at her side in one clenched hand was a pistol—a toy affair—one of his own.

Here he made another mistake. He stood above her where she lay like a wounded bird, with her bright, dilated eyes fixed on him, and closed the drawer; then he put himself still more on record as a fool by gently unclasping her small fingers and taking from them the pistol, wondering dully as he did so why her blood was not as red as the flowers in the carpet; and like a taunt came the words:

"You shall never marry *her!*"

And as he gazed, as if fascinated by the round, wide-open eyes of the Wrong Girl, the door burst open, and framed another ghastly face within its square. It was that of the landlady, who apparently disapproved of the whole affair. And he immediately told her he was sorry the thing had happened, and that he feared it might injure the letting of her rooms. She was afterwards, it is unnecessary to state, the principal witness for the prosecution.

And the Wrong Girl turned her eyes from one to the other with a queer look of appreciation.

She hung closely to life for about forty-eight very unpleasant hours, and then let go serenely enough, as a tired child turns to sleep in its nursery bed.

And all through those hours he—the Innocent Guilty—begged her in an agony which was naturally very genuine, to make a statement which would clear him.

But she would only look at him with that first queer gaze, and then whimpering softly, clasp his neck with her languid arms, while she repeated again and again that she had loved him always. And his questions and her answers sounded very badly when they were repeated at the trial. They proved his guilt very conclusively.

And as gradually breath became a rare thing greatly to be desired, and her eyes grew dull and bead-like, she would only moan plaintively and say nothing.

And when she at last died, and her baby face regained its roundness and soft smiling lips which had caused him to make his first mistake, he showed how depraved he really was for the first time, as he ejaculated in what seemed the helplessness of despairing rage:

"I hate you!"

Which unguarded expression told against him particularly heavily at the trial.

He had been in prison quite a year, however, before he received a letter from the Right Girl, in which she strongly advised him to so occupy the superfluous time which was now his, that when they should all meet once more in another world they should be happy together again, and adding that, in the meantime, she had married his Best Friend.

E. C. Waggener.

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A Romance of the Stage.

Mr. and Mrs. Clifford were on their honeymoon; it was not difficult for anyone to see that; but in the quiet little seaside village of Lytham, few, if any, probably, of the visitors recognised in Mr. Clifford the popular tenor of a certain well-known London theatre; a man whose magnificent voice night after night caused the theatre he was performing in to be crowded to suffocation.

As he lounged lazily on the beach, with his clean-shaven face turned towards his companion, he was not an exceptionally handsome-looking man, although his features were clearly defined and well cut, and his eyes, dark brown, had an irresistible look about them. At east, so thought his newly-made bride, who, oddly enough, had never as yet seen him on the stage. Had she done so with all the adventitious aid of the dresser's art, she would have been fain to confess that he was indeed a handsome man.

However, she was quite content with him as he was, and she might not have been surprised to hear that half the women in fashionable London had at one time or other fancied themselves in love with him.

Not that she would have cared for that, for had he not chosen her in preference to all others? and was he not her very own hubby, and the best hubby in the world? The sweets of honeymooning had not as yet begun to pall upon her. It was, in fact, less than a week since they had been married, and this had been their first real stopping place, the intervening period having been spent in moving about from one place to another.

Theirs had been purely a love match. Thrown together at a large country house in August, when the fashionable tenor, in consequence of the theatre being closed, had been able to snatch a few weeks' holiday—"resting," he had called it—he had been attracted by her sweet, girlish ways, so different to what he had been used to, and she, on her part, had in maidenly fashion reciprocated his attentions.

Shyly at first, being impressed with the importance attached to such a universal favourite of the London public as he was; then by degrees her dread of him vanishing. Before the time came for the party to break up, Mr. Clifford, as he was known off the stage, had proposed and been accepted.

At first her people, who occupied a good position in the county, had objected, but seeing that remonstrance would be worse than useless, had finally consented, with one stipulation, that the marriage should not take place for a year from the date of the engagement, during which time there was to be no seeing each other. They argued to themselves, probably, that long before the stated period had elapsed in the rush and excitement consequent upon the position of a popular tenor in a fashionable London theatre, who had the *entrée* to some of the best society in town, Clifford's infatuation for their little country Dorothy would have become effectually dispelled. But in this they reckoned without their man. He had kept his word, and had not attempted to see his lady love. Nothing, however, had been said as to their not writing to each other, an omission of which they took full advantage.

And now, exactly at the stipulated time, London having emptied itself of its fashionable votaries, including the majority of people who occupy the best boxes and orchestra stalls, the theatres in the West-End were for the most part closed, the one at which Mr. Clifford proved such an attraction amongst the rest, and he was free until the autumn to go where he would.

Having honestly kept his word, Dorothy's parents felt that they could no longer raise any reasonable objection, and one bright August day she and Mr. Clifford were married, very quietly, in the little church at Westerhay. So quietly, in fact, that the event was not even chronicled, as it most assuredly would have been had it been known generally, in the London papers. The orthodox announcement in the *Times* had not revealed the secret to the world at large, Mr. Clifford and Mr. Arthur Montgomery not being associated as one and the same, except in the case of his intimate friends.

"And so you want to hear me sing in public, do you, little woman? I am afraid you will hardly know me in my stage attire."

"Oh, George, as if I shouldn't know you anywhere."

"Oh, but I am quite a different personage on and off the stage, I assure you. When I am made up as a gay Lothario, for instance."

"George, dear."

"Yes, little woman?"

"Do you—do you have to make love much in your part?"

"What! Jealous, little woman?"

"No; but I shouldn't like to see you ki—kiss another woman, somehow."

"My dear child, the leading lady that I have to do my billing and cooing with is old enough to be your mother. You will see her, of course, when we get back, and are settled down."

"Oh, but aren't there any young ladies in the piece?"

"Lots of 'em, my dear."

"And do you ever——"

"Oh, yes—chuck 'em under the chin, put my arm round their waists, and all that, you know—all in the way of business, of course—one has to; but what a silly little goose it is." And here followed—— Fortunately it was a very secluded part of the beach:

"Oh, don't, George. Somebody may see us," jumping up. "And now, you lazy boy, are you going to get your letters?"

"I left word, little woman, that that small boy at our lodgings was to bring them to me here; I told him where we should be, and here he is," as a bright-faced, tanned complexioned youngster came round the corner of the cliff.

"Thanks, my little man. Here's something for you," handing him a sixpence.

"Here you are, Dolly, one, two, three, for you; and, let me see, a baker's dozen for me."

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Both were soon speedily engaged in reading their correspondence. Mr. Clifford's was not of a very interesting nature apparently, as, after glancing at one letter after another casually, he threw them down by his side.

Mrs. Clifford evidently found more enjoyment in hers, as she read them through with a look of pleasurable interest, and having done so, placed them in her pocket, leaving the envelopes on the sand at her feet.

"What are yours all about, George? I had such a nice one from mamma, another from Dick (her brother), and one from a girl-friend in Town."

"Mine; oh, most of 'em business," tearing another open as he spoke. This he glanced at casually; a cynical smile came over his face, and he quietly put it in his pocket.

"Ah, this is better," he said, the next moment, as he opened the last of the batch; "this is something like, now." And, having read it, he handed it over to his wife.

It ran as follows: "Dear Montgomery,—Things are so frightfully slow here in London that I contemplate taking a company over to the States to play light opera for a period of three months, or longer, beginning in the spring. Your agreement with the Piccadilly people terminates, I think you said, in December, and, if you haven't made arrangements, I should like to secure your services. Name your own terms. I shan't object, as you know. A spell away from town will do you no end of good, and increase your popularity on your return. So just think it over. By the way, I must congratulate you on your marriage. Who's the lady? You must let me call on you both directly you come back to town."

"Well, George, what do you mean to do?"

"Do, darling? Why, go like a shot. You won't mind, will you?" seeing a shade of disappointment come over her face.

"It will be dreadfully lonely."

"Lonely, not a bit of it. Why," laughing aloud, "you surely did not think I meant going without you, did you?"

"I thought that perhaps it wouldn't be convenient," half-crying.

"Not convenient, indeed; why I wouldn't go without you for a million a year!"

"Any other letters to show me, dear?"

"Only these," handing them over, "and they are not much likely to interest you."

She looked at two or three of them, and made a pretty little *moue* of dissent.

"What was that one you put into your pocket just now? You seemed vexed at it, I thought."

"Oh, that," with a short laugh; "only a business communication."

"Do you know, I wish you would let me see it, George?"

"I don't think you would care to, little woman; in fact, you had better not, perhaps."

That settled it.

"Better not. Then it's something you don't care to show me."

"It's only a silly letter from a very silly woman."

"Somebody in your company at the theatre, I suppose."

"No, it's not. Here, you can see it, if you like," fishing it out of his pocket. "I get enough of her, goodness knows."

Mrs. Clifford was only a woman after all, and when she saw that it commenced "Dearest Mr. Montgomery," she felt the blood surge up into her face; but as she proceeded to read further her face became ashy pale, and her hands trembled so she could hardly hold the letter. Briefly, it was a declaration of admiration for her husband, and a hope that the expressive glances he had cast at the writer from time to time during the past season, when she had been in a certain box in the theatre, the exact position of which she described so that there should be no mistake, had not been altogether devoid of meaning.

And then—Mrs. Clifford could scarcely believe her eyes—the letter continued that at a certain hour on a day named, the writer would be in Regent's Park Botanical Gardens, and gave a description of how she would be attired, so that her admirer might be able to easily recognise her, winding up, "yours devotedly, Marion."

With womanly instinct Mrs. Clifford looked for the post-mark and date. It was "London, W.," and the date nearly a fortnight old, so that the time of the appointed assignation had long gone by. There was a ray of comfort in that, at least.

The letter dropped helplessly from her trembling hands, and she burst into tears.

"Oh, George, how dreadful! do you often get letters like that?"

"Tons of 'em, my darling; but what of that? I can't tell people who come to hear me and other members of the company sing and act for their amusement that they must on no account touch the figures—no, no—must not hold any written communications with the people behind the footlights."

"I can understand that quite well, but—but if you didn't attach any importance to that letter, why did you so carefully conceal it from me? Why not have torn it up at once?"

"But, my dear girl, I do attach importance to it"—Dorothy gasped—"and when we get home I can show you a whole boxful of almost similar effusions, some of them rather more silly than this perhaps," reflectively, "but one and all having the same tenour. Can't you understand, little woman," in a gentle tone of voice, "they are to the actor or actress as much credentials to his or her ability as a whole host of printed testimonials would be, and it's only by catering to the public taste that I am able to earn the income that I do, and have gained for a wife the dearest little woman in the world?"

The argument to most minds would have seemed irrefutable, but not so to a newly-made bride of a week only.

"I don't doubt your word for a moment—but what I want to know is, did you—did you—look at this—this woman in the way she suggests?"

"Not knowingly, my dear; but when the exigencies of a play demand that I should be stone blind as to what is going on on the stage, I must look away at the audience, and I can't always be staring at the front row of the gallery, can I, now?"

"It is not always necessary to single out a box with a woman in it, I should imagine!"

"Now, my dear girl, you are surely not going to be jealous, it's too absurd; only just think to yourself, now," looking at the letter, "this silly woman will have kept her selfmade appointment at the Botanical Gardens, only to find the individual to her known as Mr. Montgomery has not thought it worth while to turn up, and after waiting about for a long time in vain, she will probably have realised what an egregious idiot she has

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been; and yet, "contemplatively, "others will do it again, as they have done before, I suppose. I can't help it. You can see that yourself."

Mrs. Clifford was bound to confess that there was nothing more to be said, and the incident ended to all outward appearances. Indeed, she was sensible little woman enough to say that she did not ever want to see any of his "business" correspondence again.

The honeymoon had come to an end, the newly-married couple were duly installed in a cosy little flat in Kensington, which was to be their future home. The theatres had re-opened, amongst them the one in which Mr. Montgomery was engaged, and flaming posters had announced that on such and such a date the noted tenor would resume the *rôle* in which he had earned for himself such unbounded popularity.

Little Mrs. Clifford had prevailed upon her husband to let her witness his resumed triumph, and having obtained a box for her in a good position, she, with an old schoolgirl friend and an attendant cavalier, sat breathlessly awaiting his appearance on the stage. At last, after the manner of fashionable tenors in light comic opera, she heard him announce his on-coming by singing a few bars of the opening song in his part. In another instant he was before her, casting one brief glance of recognition towards the box in which she was seated, he threw his whole energy into his task, and the deafening applause which greeted the conclusion of his song testified beyond doubt the estimation in which the vast audience held him.

In addition to a splendid voice, he was, as he stood there in the centre of the stage, arrayed in a most becoming costume, and his upper lip adorned with a magnificent moustache, which, to all appearance, had grown there, a strikingly handsome man, and Mrs. Clifford could not fail to note the glances of admiration bestowed upon him from the feminine members in the various parts of the auditorium, and she could not help saying to herself that *some* women—she was particular to emphasise the "some"—might be excused for making stupids of themselves about him.

As the opera proceeded she became interested in the development of the plot—her theatre-going experience had been extremely limited—but ever and anon the uncomfortable feeling of her husband's numerous anonymous admirers would be borne in upon her.

"Not that she need mind," she said to herself, "for is he not true to me, and me alone? And to think that an insignificant little person like myself should have been singled out by him to the exclusion of all these grand dames."

In her heart she was not altogether sorry when the curtain fell on the last act, and the principal performers had been called before the curtain.

Mr. Clifford did not keep his wife and her companions waiting long in the brougham, and the whole four were soon speeding westwards. Of the party three were in uproarious spirits, but Mrs. Clifford was silent and reserved, a fact which did not escape her husband's observation, although he had enough tact not to appear to notice it.

When the lady and her escort had been put down at their respective destinations, Mr. Clifford spoke:

"Well, little woman, and how did you like me in my borrowed plumes?"

"I thought the whole thing was just lovely, dear; but I shouldn't care to go often, I think. You must find it dreadfully monotonous singing the same songs night after night."

"Oh! I don't know; one gets used to it in time; but I shan't be sorry of a change in the spring."

"Have you decided to go to America, then?"

"Yes, dear, old X—— came round to the theatre to-night and got me to sign an agreement. He is giving me just double what I am getting now."

"Oh, I'm so glad," clapping her hands delightedly.

"What an avaricious little woman it is," was his laughing reply.

Had he been able to read his Dolly's innermost thoughts, he would perhaps have been surprised to find that it was *not* the idea of increased wealth which was paramount amongst them.

It was when one of these moods were upon her one night, that she hastily went to her writing-table and dashed off a short note to the friend who had shared her box on the occasion of her one and only visit to the theatre.

"Dearest Kitty,—If you have nothing else to do, come over to-morrow evening, and let us have a cosy chat together. It will be quite like old times."

Miss Kitty promptly wrote to say she would come.

For a while after her arrival the conversation was devoted to topics dear to the feminine mind, and then the visitor remarked:

"Wasn't your husband splendid the other night? Do you know, I almost envied you."

"I suppose George is what you would call good-looking, isn't he?"

"Good-looking, my dear, doesn't express it; he's just divine!—when he is on the stage, I mean. Why, before he married you, half the women in London set their caps at him."

"But do they know he is married now, do you think?" was the anxious rejoinder.

"It doesn't matter much whether they do or not, you little goose. Women who go mad after a popular actor don't bother much about his marital relations."

"Oh; do you know, George showed me a letter from someone before he was married, and said he was always getting them, and that he thought nothing of them. Do all actors, do you think, get letters of—of that description?"

"Well, my dear, not all of them, perhaps. Fancy a woman writing to old ————, for instance. But with your husband it's different, you see. Yes, quite different."

"Kitty, you don't mean to say that you ——"

"No! No!! No!!!" laughing, "on my honour. Never did—not to him, anyway," she added, *sotto voce*. But the sentence caught Mrs. Clifford's ear all the same.

"Of course not—but Kitty—you seem to know all about this—this sort of thing. You don't think George ever would ——"

"Would what? Why, you silly little goose, of course he wouldn't. Women write to him—he can't help that—but you take my word for it, he is much too sensible and too fond of you, too, I fancy, to ever bother to reply to them."

"I'm sure of that, dear old George; and yet, do you know, I should like to try him. Only just for a joke, you know, and then I could tell him all about it after, and we could have a good laugh over it."

"My dear Dorothy, do you think you could disguise your writing so that he wouldn't know it? Impossible."

"I don't see the impossibility of it, Kitty. I had no idea" (calmly) "of writing to George myself, but there can be no possible harm or objection in your doing so. It's only a joke, you know."

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"Me!"

"And why not? I heard you say just now you had never been guilty of such an indiscretion. 'Not to him, anyway,' were your exact words, I think. So it can't be anything very dreadful for you to undertake, and oh, Kitty" (in a sudden outburst of excitement) "I do so want to be sure, quite, quite sure. I don't doubt George the least bit in the world, you know, but——"

"Well, you have a strange way of showing your implicit trust in him, that's all I can say."

"Now, Kitty, do be reasonable; you don't know what it is to be married, and I do love George so; I can't bear to think that any other woman could ever cause him to forget me even for a moment. Oh, Kitty, the idea of it is awful, too awful to contemplate!"

"There, there, don't cry; give me pen, ink, and paper, and I'll just do it this very minute."

"Have you got any plain paper?"

"Yes; I have some extra glazed in my desk; here it is."

"Yes, this will do"—holding it up to the light—"there is no distinguishing water-mark; one can't be too careful in these matters."

Mrs. Clifford looked at her friend in silent admiration.

"Now, then, what am I to say?"

"How should I know, dear; I thought you would. I mean, you know so much more of the world than I do. You say just what you think best."

Miss Kitty pursed her lips and began to write, and in a few minutes handed over the letter for inspection.

"Dearest Mr. Montgomery,—I may, of course, be mistaken, but it seemed to me the other evening that when singing that charming love song of yours in the second act your glances were directed towards a certain box on the second tier. I will not particularise which until I hear that my suspicions were not absolutely incorrect. I am going to the play again on Monday next; will you let me know what are your favourite flowers; then I will wear them, and if you will say where I can see you afterwards you may rely on my being in good time."

"There, my dear, that ought to do the trick, I think."

"Capital; why it's the very way in which that other woman wrote to him; but hadn't you better sign it? The letter George showed me was signed, I remember."

"Oh, I don't think it matters much; I am sure your husband is much too sensible a man to take any notice of it."

"I am sure he is; but we may as well do the thing properly while we are about it."

"Very well, then, 'Yours devotedly, Florrie.' There's another thing, though. Supposing—I only say supposing, mind you—he should be tempted to reply, we have given no address."

"Ah! I never thought of that," with dismay. "We can't invent an address as well as a name—oh, dear! oh, dear!—and so we can't do it after all."

A curious little smile passed over Miss Kitty's face. "Do you know, I am not at all sure that I am doing right in aiding and abetting you in this matter; but, having begun, I suppose we may as well see it through."

"Well?"

"Well, just this. I believe—in fact, I have heard—that there are certain libraries in London where one can have one's letters addressed. Let me see! Yes, of course. I know; there's Liber's, in Bayswater—not far from our house, you know—and you can come and call on me, and just look in as you pass and see if there any answer."

"Kitty, you are an angel!"

"Perhaps—perhaps not. I don't think it is quite certain."

The address named having been duly added, the two friends, one of them feeling decidedly like a conspirator, together went out and posted the precious missive in an adjacent pillar-box.

"Of course, if no answer comes within a day or two, I shall tell George all about——"

"Not implicating *me*, if you please."

"Of course not—as if I should."

"But supposing he *does* reply, what then?" in a joking tone.

"But he won't," with decision.

The next day, putting on as bold a face on the matter as she could, Mrs. Clifford walked into Liber's, and in a voice not altogether free from emotion, asked if there were any letters for "Florrie." The assistant looked into a pigeon-hole, and in the most matter-of-fact way handed one over to her.

She recognised the handwriting—his handwriting—at a glance, and, hailing the first cab, got in, told the man where to drive, and with trembling fingers opened the envelope.

"Dearest and adorable one,—So you have discovered my secret? It is true that when you are present I seem inspired, and the words I sing have for once a meaning that I never at other times experience. Much as I should like to see you at the theatre on Monday next, I do not think it altogether wise. People are so apt to be curious, and as it is I have had to put up with a certain amount of chaff about Box——. So you see I know who my fair correspondent is. The better plan will be for you to take a cab, and go quietly to the Café à Londres, and ask for private Room No. 8. The door-keeper will have had his instructions, and, if you will pardon my saying so, it will be well to dress as quietly as possible, and you can easily wear a wrap which will conceal your identity to a certain extent. Don't be later than 11.45, as I want to go to a dance after. Yours devotedly, George——"

"The brute! And to sign his own name, too! Monday next, the very night he promised to take me to a dance at the Upton's! Oh, I shall go out of my mind!"

"You look bored, little woman," said George, at dinner a few hours later. "I fancy you stay in by yourself too much. Why don't you go to the theatre some times; Mrs. FitzWilliam would be only to glad to take you any evening."

"Oh, it is a little dull sometimes; but do you know I have got an idea I should like to see you play again just once; it's a fancy I have got. Could you get me a box for next Monday?"

"Very sorry, my dear, but there isn't a seat in the house open for next week."

"You ought to be a very proud man to create such a *furore*. Well, if it can't be managed, some other night will do. By the way, we are asked to Mrs. Upton's dance that night. Can you take me?"

"Of course I can. But don't bother to come to the theatre for me; it only means coming all the way back here again. Their house is close by, you know."

Mrs. Clifford said nothing, but reflected on the duplicity of human nature, and that of the genus man in particular.

On the Monday night, having left word for her husband that she had gone to Mrs. Upton's, just after eleven o'clock she drove in a cab to the Café à Londres. She had been careful to observe the instruc-

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tions conveyed in the letter, which she had taken the precaution to put in her pocket, and the white woolly wrap wound loosely about her head effectually served to veil her identity.

An obsequious doorkeeper assisted her to alight, and, in response to her somewhat tremulous inquiry for Room No. 8, a waiter with an ivory tablet bearing that number in his coat, came forward and ushered her into a snug little room, on the table of which was an elegant little supper laid for two persons.

She glanced at the clock; it was just 11.45. Now, then, she would not have long to wait; for Mr. Clifford prided himself on nothing more than his punctuality. Still the hands went on, and presently the French clock chimed the hour of twelve, and still he did not appear.

Quarter past, half past, and then she became desperate. She rang the bell. A waiter appeared instantly; so quickly, indeed, that he might have been at the other side of the door.

"There is no other number 8 room, I suppose?" was the only thing that occurred to her.

"No, miss."

Miss, indeed! "Thank you," and the waiter retired.

Mrs. Clifford began to think possibly he had repented after all, and had gone home. If so all was bound to come out. But worse still, how was she to get away from this odious place. The unconsumed supper would have to be paid for, she supposed, and instinctively she took out her purse. Horror of horrors, it contained a few shillings only! Once more she rang the bell; the waiter appeared without delay.

"The gentleman," he began, with a smirk.

"Has he arrived?"

"No, miss; I was going to observe——" but his observation, whatever it might have been, remained unsaid.

"Tell the manager I wish to speak to him, please. I had ah—an appointment to sup here with a gentleman at 11.45, but now I see it's nearly one o'clock, and I fear something must have occurred to prevent my hu——" she had almost said husband, but just managed to substitute the word friend, "from keeping his appointment, and I am sorry to say I have come out without any money, beyond some silver; otherwise I should have been pleased to pay for——"

"Pray do not mention such a thing, madam; mistakes will occur, and the gentleman will doubtless call to-morrow and explain; allow me to have a cab called."

Mrs. Clifford did not know how to be grateful enough to him.

Just as the clock struck two she turned the latch-key in the door of her flat, her feelings being not easily described.

In the dining-room sat Mr. Clifford, in evening dress, reading a book.

She started at the unexpected apparition.

"How early you went away, dear. I was here just before twelve o'clock, and you had gone."

"You did come for me, then, as you promised?"

"Of course I did, little woman; and do you know I had such a queer story to tell you. Ever since I have resumed my part in our show I have been more than ever bothered with letters from inane women, like the one I showed you at Lytham. Well, last week I got an even more than usually venturesome effusion from someone styling herself Florrie. I can't think why I did it, but instead of putting it away unanswered I actually took the trouble to reply to it, making an appointment to sup with her this very night."

"But you didn't mean to go, George?"

"My dear girl, what could have put such an idea into your head? Hadn't I promised to take you to this dance? and I couldn't be in two places at once very well, could I?"

"Of course not, how silly of me."

"Well, as I was saying, I made the appointment, ordered the supper, and, being a stranger, paid for it beforehand, and just mentioned casually to the waiter I might be late, and that he was to show the lady in directly she came."

"Oh, George, and she may be there yet!"

"I don't fancy so. She might have waited a while, and then she would realise she had been duped, and find her way home, a wiser woman, it is to be hoped."

"It was hardly fair to play such a trick, was it?"

"Oh, I don't know; women are such idiots, they must expect to put up with inconveniences sometimes. By the way, do you remember my opening a letter from some girl friend of yours when we were down at Lytham? It struck me the writing was wonderfully like this," producing the fatal envelope.

"Oh, no; it is alike, certainly, somewhat alike, but there is a difference; besides, Kitty would never do such a thing, I'm sure."

"Well, you know best, little woman, and now I'm going to turn in. Why, you haven't given me a kiss, puss; getting tired of me already?"

"Oh, no, no, George," kissing him passionately, "I can never, never love you enough, I think; but only think of that poor infatuated woman; supposing she is waiting for you still?"

"Serve her right if she is," was the brutal reply. "Now, trot along upstairs; I'll follow you in a couple of minutes, as soon as I get to the end of this cigar."

He re-entered the dining-room and picked up his book. It was Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy." What in the name of all creation could Mr. Clifford find in this book that he should be compelled to stuff a silk handkerchief into his mouth to prevent him exploding with laughter. The writer does not know. Possibly Kitty does.

ANNIE DAVIS

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UNFINISHED

"THESE pictures!—Well, I see they puzzle you. I never knew any one they didn't. People who have no love of art think them simply absurd, but the artists and you connoisseurs are just puzzled by them. I know what you are saying to yourself:

"'When the man could get qualities like that, could see things in that astounding way, why in the name of all that exists did he not do more? What did he leave his things in that condition for? And what under the sun is the matter with them? I can't pick out one that is not a failure, notwithstanding the delightful colour, and that feeling in their execution which is so delicate and subtle as to be almost uncanny. But there is something wanting, something left undone, as though the hand had been arrested in the making, so that a bit of the soul of the thing had been left out. It is so with the least scrap of a sketch you have here. Curious!'

"Well, I give those pictures that corner of my studio, and I usually let people look and marvel about them, but I have never fully explained them to any one.

"You say you are a metaphysician; that you are interested in the curiosities of human nature. I feel compelled to give you the history of the man who painted them. He was my chum when I was a student in Paris, ten years ago. I did not know him before, though we both were English. His name was Ralph Esby. I shall not soon forget the day Ralph Esby came walking into the studio. We were under Bonnat—a splendid lot of strong men, that class was—Frenchmen, English, Greeks, Danes, Americans, and I don't know what other nationalities. He came walking in, looking like a young god. A tall fellow, of about twenty-three, with a certain slenderness, although rather strongly built. And he had a grace of movement which matched his handsome face. Yet, strange to say, he would sometimes do things in the most awkward and rigid way, as if to contradict the assumption that he possessed this charming grace. For instance, he would throw himself back from his work to give it a critical look with a motion in which there was more of an inspiration to us fellows than in the prettiest model we had. When, suddenly, just as you felt an admiring thrill going over you, especially if you had conceived the enthusiasm for Esby which I had, he would give your æsthetic nerves a shock by drawing himself up rigidly—snap!—as though something had left him. And he'd abandon his work, and off he'd go without a word to anyone.

"We had such a respect for him and his work, though, that no one said much that might look critical. Occasionally a fellow with more callous sensibilities than the usual run of men, would go up to his easel with:

"'Isn't that jolly, now; but, I say, Esby, why don't you finish?'

"He'd just get a little red, smile, with a strange look in his eye—if he had let himself out more you might have called it a hopeless sort of look—and he'd turn off with a joke about something no one ever ventured to notice. This was a personal peculiarity of his. The coat-sleeve of his left arm was empty. It had come from no accident—he had been born without the arm. What he would say was:

"'You can't expect an unfinished fellow to finish his picture.'

"It wasn't in character for him to make a joke of that kind. It rather jarred upon you. We used to wish those 'thick-skins,' would let him alone.

"I attached myself to him from the beginning. I am an enthusiastic person, and naturally express what I feel. But, in spite of my enthusiasm for Esby, which grew daily, there was always something essential lacking in our friendship.

"Evidently he was not a rich fellow, though he never seemed to want for means. He had an atelier, like many of us, and lived at the restaurants. He had no friends in Paris outside our set, and I was the only one there whom he visited intimately. However, the fellows all felt honoured by an invitation to Esby's atelier, and many a good bottle of wine and crust of bread we've broken there.

"There was a piano which Smith used to play, and we had some good voices, too. Esby himself never touched the piano before anyone. Of course, he only had one hand to play with, and yet I've heard him make music, pretty, strange, and beautiful, as I've sometimes come up the stairs, which would stop as soon as he heard my step.

"He was particularly sensitive about his music. A song he never sang through with the fellows, though in particularly fine passages he would often join in, and his voice had a rich quality. But if ever he sang more than a few notes there would be the consciousness of something out of harmony in the singing—something which you did not quite like to hear, though not out of tune or anything of that kind. He would immediately stop himself then, with a slight, impatient movement, and probably not try it again the rest of the evening. There was one subject that we never broached at Esby's. That was the ladies. It always fell flat, and we learnt by-and-bye that either Esby was totally indifferent to the fair sex—his manner implied it—or else he had had a wound from Cupid which was not healed. The fellows speculated somewhat about it.

"Imagine, then, my surprise when I came in on him one evening and found him sitting over his fire with a letter in his hand, which he held in a listless, melancholy way. As he didn't put it away or make any movement to conceal his attitude of mind, the characteristic thing for him to do, of course, I looked at him inquiringly. I said: 'What's up, Esby?' He just handed over the letter,

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with 'I'm a confounded rascal, Harry,' and then he got up and began pacing the floor.

"The letter was a delicate-scented thing, in a woman's handwriting. It ran thus:

"My Dear Ralph—You will be surprised to receive this letter so soon after my last, which I posted but two days ago. But that last was like all the letters which I have been writing to you this winter, not a true, frank letter, but a kind of make-believe. And to-day I have determined to tell you all I have been thinking, that once more things may be open and real between us; for your letters, dear Ralph, have been make-believes, too. Indeed, is it not so that our happy frankness had disappeared even before you said farewell? I felt it, though I would not believe it then. I cannot explain—I cannot understand it. Not in regard to you, Ralph. With another person it might be different. Oh! Ralph, my dear Ralph, you still love me?

"The letter was blistered with tears, and there was no signature.

"Esby came over and took it out of my hand, saying: 'I shall write to her to come over, and I'll give it a fair trial. Perhaps it will return to me. I thought it might by absence. But I'm afraid it's like the painting and everything else, I can't put anything more into it. It must be left unfinished. I'm afraid it's constitutional!' And Esby—reserved Esby—actually buried his face in his hands and wept.

"I felt sure that it was the first time he had candidly declared that last even to himself.

"The month following this Esby worked in a particularly spasmodic way, and he was in a more than usually reticent frame of mind. We had no confidential talks, he did not come to my room without one of the other fellows, and I avoided surprising him alone in his.

"But one evening he came in with the expression of dejected determination, which had been growing on his face for six weeks, a good deal deepened.

"'Bright,' he said, 'I'd like you to meet some friends of mine—Miss Hartley and her father—just come over.'

"I understood who Miss Hartley was, and I was somewhat agitated by the invitation. After all it was only a formal call we made, but I came away feeling that if Ralph could cease to love Madge Hartley there must be something normally wrong about him.

"For a whole week Ralph and I saw Mr. Hartley and his daughter. We showed them Paris—Ralph devotedly attended the lady, and I piloted the old gentleman. He and I kept up a pretty even flow of spirits and conversation, but Ralph and his lady were a melancholy pair.

"Her father was not an observant person, but even he began to think there was that in the atmosphere beyond his ken, and he confided to me that he thought there must be something amiss between young Esby and his daughter. They used to be famous friends.

"By Saturday morning I felt that I could not keep an indifferent look upon things any longer. Those two faces haunted me tragically when they were not before my eyes. I called for Esby about nine o'clock. We were to take his friends to Versailles by boat. A pleasant plan enough for people in real holiday humour.

"A second time Esby sat dejectedly in his room with a letter in his hand.

"He rose and said, quickly: 'You'd better go to the class, Bright, and hear the criticism. Miss Hartley is not well, and we shall not go to Versailles. It's a shame to have kept you from work all this week—but you're a good fellow, Bright, a stunning good fellow,' and Esby shook my hand with great warmth.

"'Shan't we call or send some flowers, Ralph?' said I.

"'No,' he replied; 'I'll write her a note.'

"I did go up to the atelier, but my thoughts were not much upon what Bonnat was saying, although the other fellows seemed more than usually interested. They twitted me a bit about having been kept away by one of the fair sex. 'We might have expected it of an enormous creature like you, Bright; but what's taken hold of Esby?' I wasn't in a joking nor confiding humour, so I muttered something about Esby attending to his own affairs, and I went off for a walk by the Seine. I'm not often irritable, but the fellows jarred on me.

"Esby rested on my mind, and I thought of Madge Hartley, shut in her room in this strange city, sad, despairing thoughts haunting her. Towards evening I wandered up to Ralph's room. Pinned upon the door was a paper, and on it written: 'Go in, Bright.' I quickly turned the handle and entered.

"The room was entirely vacant, but opposite me stood a portrait of Esby—a portrait which I had never seen, yet immediately recognised as done with the most exaggerated peculiarities of his brush; so strangely like my friend was it, yet a weird thing, uncanny, ghostly. He never did a piece of work more beautiful in colour, and full of a wonderfully strange inspiration. But the sadness and despair which shone through its ghostliness was so great that it was with a heart stilled by premonition that I read a word painted beneath with a slender brush of carmine. This was the word, 'Unfinished.'

"I stood some time gazing upon the portrait in a blind kind of way, repeating mechanically, 'Unfinished!' And gradually the terrible fear grew that Ralph had done something desperate. Poor Ralph! No one in his sane mind ever painted a portrait like that.

"I rushed up to the Hartley's. Mr. Hartley received me with a grave face, and gave me a letter.

"It was a letter from Ralph to Madge. He told her frankly what he had told me—the whole course of his feelings towards her:

"'And now,' he said, 'if you were a woman to receive such a thing I should offer myself as your husband, but to you I am well aware that would be useless. Many years ago the suspicion of this strange peculiarity of my nature dawned upon me—this incapacity for completion, in any condition or acting of my life. I have been ever since warding off an acknowledgment of it to myself. How much braver, how infinitely better a thing it would have been to have acknowledged it, the pain which I have brought upon you and upon myself is witness. I cannot even ask you to forgive me.

"'Yet you will not deem that I am without realisation of what I have done, when I tell you that I have gone into banishment—a man without an arm, symbol of the incomplete. It is not the ending of a miserable life I am contemplating. It is but complete retirement from life as it is, its daily contact with my fellow men. In the wilderness of some primitive land, perhaps a kindly providence will some day say 'Finished.'

"It is ten years since I read that, and that's the last I've seen of Ralph Esby. I've heard that his father was killed in a duel, shot in the arm, and that his mother died when he was born, soon after. One can put two and two together in regard to poor Ralph's peculiarities. All these years we have been wondering where Ralph might be, but the uncertainty came to an end a year since, when a fellow from Australia came into my studio and handed me a card, upon which was written, in a feeble hand, 'Harry, my boy, I've finished!'

"'It was a wild colt finished him,' said the man.

"Miss Hartley? Oh, she had a severe illness. But her father and I nursed her through.

"For six years I did not say anything to her in regard to the state of my feelings. Then I asked her to be my wife, and we've been married four years now.

"I wish we could have told Ralph."

Richard Sibest.

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IT CAME TO PASS

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM

CHAPTER IX.

CHARLOTTE received a telegram forestalling Raymond's arrival. Her joy quite equalled the sender's, as she sought Hugh with a radiant gleam of pleasure in her eyes, waving the glad tidings aloft.

"He is coming," she cried, joyfully, with almost childish excitement. "Oh! Hugh, dear, I am so glad!"

Their beaming faces flushed and glowed as they re-read his message together.

"How I shall count the hours to meeting him!" she sighed, her heart overwhelming with gratitude and content.

It had all seemed like an evil dream to Charlotte, and a great load fell from her shoulders, as she carried a bouquet of roses to Mrs. Leigh, who was reclining on a sofa, pale, weary, and exhausted.

"How thoughtful of you to bring coloured flowers," she said, pressing them lovingly to her cheek. "The white blossoms look so funereal, and there will be time enough for them by-and-bye."

Reclining on a sofa, pale, weary, and exhausted.

"Oh! do not speak so gloomily!" cried Charlotte. "I fancy the doctor here is an alarmist, for Nurse Evelyn is very hopeful, and declares you are a 'splendid patient!'"

"Dear little soul! She is always bright, yet so quiet, and tricks me into believing myself better. I don't think I care whether I live or die, the last twenty years have been so full of sorrow. Death is sometimes a release."

"Would you like to see Hugh? Nurse said we might sit with you, and he is waiting outside to hear how you are."

"Oh! do call him in!" she exclaimed eagerly. "I should love it above all things."

Hugh came gladly, thinking of his own illness, and the lonely suffering.

As he entered, Mrs. Leigh gazed at him with the same wondering expression she had worn on the first night.

"I hear you are expecting your father shortly," she said, by way of conversation. "Are you considered like him?"

Hugh coloured. How *could* he admit he had never seen him!

"They have the same eyes," murmured Charlotte, moving across the room to arrange the flowers. As she did so Mrs. Leigh lowered her voice, addressing Hugh falteringly.

"I am so glad that Mrs. Peel is happy," she whispered. "How pleased you will be to have your father with you again! His wife is a different woman at the mere prospect. Surely they are wonderfully devoted?"

"I believe so."

"Believe! Are you not certain?"

"Yes," answered Hugh emphatically.

"You must have a very delightful home with such a charming step-mother, or perhaps you still remember your own mother?"

"No. She died when I was an infant."

"So during your childhood you never knew a mother's care? Poor little boy!"

Tears filled her eyes, as she held out her hand sympathetically.

Charlotte returned to her seat by the couch, and noticed a hungry hunted look on Mrs. Leigh's face, such as she had seen stamped on the features of men who race behind luggage-laden vehicles. The invalid shivered in the sunshine as if an icy blast had struck her.

"Are you cold?" asked Mrs. Peel.

"No," she replied, drawing her fleecy shawl about her throat. "I don't think I am really cold, but I said just now I did not care to live—you remember?"

Charlotte bent her head in assent.

"Well, I take back my words. I shivered just then at the thought of death."

She spoke slowly and with effort.

"Have you no home?" Hugh was constrained to ask.

"Not now. I was once a happy young wife like Mrs. Peel, with life before instead of behind

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me. Then I had a beautiful house, standing in a high-walled garden, and dogs and horses and carriages of

A happy young wife like Mrs. Peel.

my own; but lately I have wandered from one Pension to another, till I grew to know the courses and the conversation by heart, and the smell of the cooking and the shape of the rooms, and the position of the bed, and the people.

"Yes, the people were the worst of all. They could only talk of their own affairs—not one wasted a moment to sympathise with me. They were indeed a contrast to you and your step-mother. Then when I knew I could only live a few months, I gave up economising, and came to this hotel. My good angel must have led me here, but it is sad to make friends, only to part."

Charlotte bent over the tear-stained cheek, and kissed it lovingly.

"You must not talk too much," she whispered, "or nurse won't let us stay. Shall I read to you?"

"Yes, if you don't mind. I prefer poetry, it soothes my nerves."

She drew a little red book from under her pillow, entitled, "Lays and Lyrics," by Clement Scott.

"These are my favourites," she said. "Read me one verse, the first you come to, and I will close my eyes and listen."

As the shadows deepened into twilight Charlotte read softly, while Hugh sat watching the wan face on the couch with unspeakable awe. He had never seen death, and the grim spectre hovering over their new friend chilled his blood.

Charlotte's voice was naturally low and musical, and she murmured the lines slowly, hoping the patient might fall asleep:

"What was your life ten years ago?
You woman with the haunting face;
With eyes so soft and voice so low,
Who came in fancy to this place.
You touched my face and took my hand,
And whispered of a life to be,
Some day in distant flower-land,
When calling you would answer me.
What was the hope that seemed to grow,
In dreams of you ten years ago?"

"No—it was not ten—twenty!" cried Mrs. Leigh, starting up with staring eyes. "*Twenty* years ago!"

CHAPTER X.

"No one in the whole world could be happier than I am to-day!" whispered Charlotte, glancing from her husband's loving eyes to the smile of peaceful content upon Hugh's face.

She felt justly proud of uniting these two lives, and a great joy reigned in her heart at the complete success of her plans.

"You gave me a terrible period of suspense," Raymond declared, turning to his wife and laying his hand tenderly on hers.

"And finally my letter was brought to you in church," she replied, gazing at him with her soul in her eyes. "I think it was a good omen, dear, don't you?"

"Perhaps."

"I did not want you to be miserable," she continued, "and yet I am glad it was not a theatre. It is so nice to be missed."

"My tyrant conscience gave me no time for amusement," he replied; "and even now I hardly dare look away from you, for fear you should vanish again. Anyhow, darling, I deserved to suffer, and your mind may be easy on one point. I can see that Hugh and I are not going to quarrel over any miserable misunderstandings. He is the best of sons, since he forgives those long years spent apart, for the sake of our sweet peacemaker—Charlotte Peel." He kissed her hand as he spoke.

"It was almost worth the separation to be reunited," she said, realising how passionately in love she was still with her husband.

Hugh slipped quietly away, knowing they would like to be alone. So engrosssd was he with his own thoughts, that he never saw Nurse Evelyn on the staircase, and woke from his reverie with a start at the sound of her voice.

"Have you a minute to spare?" she asked.

"Yes. Can I do anything for you?"

"Mrs. Leigh wants you to bid her good-bye. She is convinced that she will die before the morning. I promised to tell you, she begged so hard."

"I will come," he answered, gravely.

It was a summons he could not disobey.

In the meanwhile, Raymond and Charlotte unburdened their hearts to each other, and perfect confidence reigned between them.

"We will live a newer, freer life dear," she said, a glad light leaping into her eyes. "The barrier between us is broken down now I know everything."

He kissed her hand as he spoke.

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He had recounted to her his quarrel with Augusta, and a smile played round Charlotte's lips as he spoke of Mrs. Donnington-Bain's threatening letter.

"You do not fear that woman, Raymond?"

"No. But she nearly drove me frantic refusing to reveal the boy's address, and laughing at my misery. Then when I disregarded her, she fired off an insane epistle, which I did not condescend to answer."

"What is this unknown evil she speaks of?"

"I do not know, but certainly nothing that need trouble you. It probably merely exists in her melodramatic brain."

"She is the sublimity of ignorance and impertinence," laughed Charlotte.

"I received a sarcastic telegram from her, declaring she would tell 'her news' before the week closes. It is only a trick to obtain money."

"Let her proclaim our story on the housetops," cried Charlotte, with a defiant shrug of her shoulders. "I do not care. We are happy together in our love, and the world, or rather the people in it, cannot interfere with our lives. We will be utterly free."

"You could say nothing to please me more," he replied. "You took me 'for better, for worse,' Charlotte, and have remained staunch even through slander, not only drawing me to my son, but rescuing his life at a critical moment."

"There is still a shadow over this brightest of bright days," she replied, "which is troubling me, Raymond. Since our arrival we have been deeply interested in a forlorn lady dying in this hotel. It seems such a very sad case! She has no friends, and Hugh and I cheer her in any little way we can. To-day she is sinking fast, yet still takes a keen interest in all our doings. I must not forget her in the midst of my own happiness."

"I wondered," she continued, slipping her hand in his, "whether you would come and see her? I think it might be kind. We need only stay a few minutes."

"You are always thoughtful for others, Charlotte," he said, tenderly. "But is she strong enough to see a stranger?"

"Oh, yes, just say a few words, and show interest. That is what she craves, poor soul."

Raymond followed willingly, as Charlotte led the way to 149, creeping with gentle footsteps to the door and opening it cautiously.

"May we come in, Nurse?" she whispered. "I have brought my husband to see Mrs. Leigh."

"You must talk very little," Nurse Evelyn replied.

"The young gentleman is here. She asked to see him." They entered noiselessly. The blind was lowered, casting queer shadow's over the patient's face.

"Is she asleep?" asked Mrs. Peel.

"No," whispered the nurse. "I heard her speak a moment since."

Raymond approached the sofa at a sign from Charlotte, and the dying woman opened her eyes, staring at him wonderingly. She stretched out her wasted arms, her figure trembling like an aspen leaf, while suddenly there poured from her lips a torrent of incoherent words.

Charlotte watched the ghastly face unheedful of Raymond.

"At last!" moaned the feeble voice—"at last—husband—forgive me!"

"Her mind is wandering," said Nurse Evelyn, anxiously.

"And she mistakes Raymond——" began Charlotte, but her sentence was interrupted by wild disjointed phrases.

"Heaven has sent you. Bless me—my husband—bless me—and forgive me before I die. Let me feel your hand in mine—your kiss upon my cheek. Oh, Heaven! the crime—the crime—it was red—all red. Look at the boy! He is not stained—but pure as the free air—nearly twenty years—twenty years since that awful day. Husband—good-bye! God bless you!"

She fell forward with a sharp cry, as Raymond caught her in his arms. The frail form stiffened, and the horrible struggle of death took place. Charlotte hid her face, while Nurse Evelyn moved hastily between them.

"It is over," she whispered, when Raymond staggered back.

"Are you ill, Raymond?" Charlotte asked, leading him away. "Is anything the matter? She might almost have been your wife, you look so white and faint!"

Charlotte hid her face.

He gazed at her a moment, while great drops of perspiration stood out on his brow. Then he grasped her arm in a frenzy of uncontrollable emotion.

"Charlotte!" he cried, in a voice that froze her. "You have spoken truly. God knows *how*, but that woman *was* my wife!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE tragic life in 149 had ended, yet its latter history was revealed that same evening in the promised letter from Mrs. Donnington-Bain.

Charlotte read it with aching eyes—Charlotte who had no real right to the name of Peel. It was a heartless epistle from a heartless woman.

DEAR RAYMOND,—You might have avoided the shame and disgrace of a surprising revelation had you accepted my terms and not flouted my warning. Now you have only yourself to thank for the knowledge. The startling fact you force from me is that my sister—your wife—still lives! You believed she met a felon's death when you fled to the wilds of Africa. You had not the courage to wait or you would have heard of her reprieve. While *you* cast off the burden she dragged out her weary twenty years in prison. However, I still give you a chance of keeping this secret from your Charlotte, but you must pay for it. Double the allowance you have been making me, or she and the whole world shall know the truth! Do you now realise you are in the clutch of AUGUSTA DONNINGTON-BAIN?

How little she knew that her plot was foiled, and powerless to destroy.

* * * * *

Once more Charlotte and Raymond knelt before the altar, and when they returned to England her name was really Charlotte Peel.

THE END.

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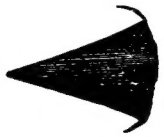

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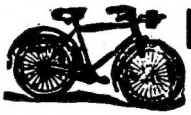

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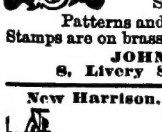

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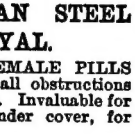

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ATOMS AND ORGANISMS.

MR. KINGDON CLIFFORD, the brilliant young scientist whose death at Madeira several years ago was properly regarded as a loss to the circle of original investigators, affirmed that atoms flew about in the air of an ordinary room at the exact rate of seventeen miles per minute. How he could know that fact no other scientist has ever pretended to understand, as an atom is defined to be a particle of matter so small as to be beyond recognition by the senses. Yet isn't the custom of explaining the existence of certain diseases by attributing them to the action of "micro-organisms" almost as far-fetched? Take a simple illustration:

In October, 1891, Mr. James Miles, of Brown's Lane, Bright Waltham, Wantage, Berks, had a severe attack of influenza which left him very feeble and languid. He had a foul taste in the mouth, and his tongue and teeth were so coated with a slimy phlegm that he says he could scarcely get his lips apart. In a little time his skin turned a deep yellow, the whites of his eyes being tinged with the same colour. His appetite was very poor, and after every morsel he ate he suffered intense pain at the chest and around the waist. "On occasions," says Mr. Miles, "this pain amounted to agony; what I endured because of it is beyond my power to describe. It continued for hours."

This, of course, was the result of a nervous reaction from some deep-lying cause. But what was the cause? Was it a sequence of influenza, or something very different? Let us hear him a little further.

"I was much troubled with flatulency," he continues, "and my heart fluttered and throbbed until I became alarmed."

Certainly this cardiac disturbance could not have been set up by any "micro-organisms," as every physiologist knows. The stomach, expanded by gas, pressed against the heart and disordered its action. This was a purely mechanical trouble—but whence arose the gas? it is not, surely, a symptom of influenza.

"I got little sleep day or night," says Mr. Miles, "and was so restless that I tossed about the bed all night long. Cold clammy sweats broke out all over me, and I trembled and shook from head to foot. I had a harassing cough, and spat up quantities of thick phlegm, and my breathing was short and hurried."

This looked like asthma; in fact, the presence of consumption was inferred from it by some observers. Yet the outcome of the case discredited this view.

"I rapidly lost flesh," he writes, "and became so weak that I was unable to speak aloud, and so nervous that I could not bear to be spoken to. Gradually I sank lower and lower until my breathing became so difficult that *for three weeks I sat before the fire* night and day, powerless to move. When at last they got me to bed I remained there propped up with pillows. The doctor allowed me to take liquid food only, saying my heart was diseased and I must be careful.

"I got as weak as it is possible for a man to be and live. Many times I thought I must die."

When we consider his excessively debilitated condition, the last paragraph of Mr. Miles's letter becomes of public interest and importance. Here it is, word for word:

"In this state I continued until Easter of 1892, when a friend brought me a bottle of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. After I had taken this medicine for a week I felt great relief. I could eat, and my food gave me strength. I kept on taking it and got stronger daily. When I had used two bottles I was well and strong as ever in my life, and have been so ever since. This remedy saved my life, and I wish others to know it. I therefore not only consent to the publication of this statement, but will gladly answer inquiries. (Signed) James Miles."

Mr. Miles is a man well known and thoroughly respected in his district, and the facts as he gives them are supported by Mr. William Jordan, Postmaster at Bright Waltham, and by many others.

But a word of comment is called for. The influenza is, no doubt, primarily caused by impurity of the blood, and developed by exposure acting upon pre-existing weakness; and both the weakness and the blood poison are caused by indigestion and dyspepsia, the only disease from which our friend suffered—influenza being an incident and symptom.

Thus we see that to fathom most diseases it is not necessary to trouble our heads about invisible forces in the atmosphere, as the seeds germinate in the stomach—not in the air. To remember this fact and act upon it will prove a matter of public and personal good sense. To guard against influenza keep the digestion in order and the body well nourished. Prevent indigestion by using Mother Seigel's Syrup on the first sign of its approach.

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